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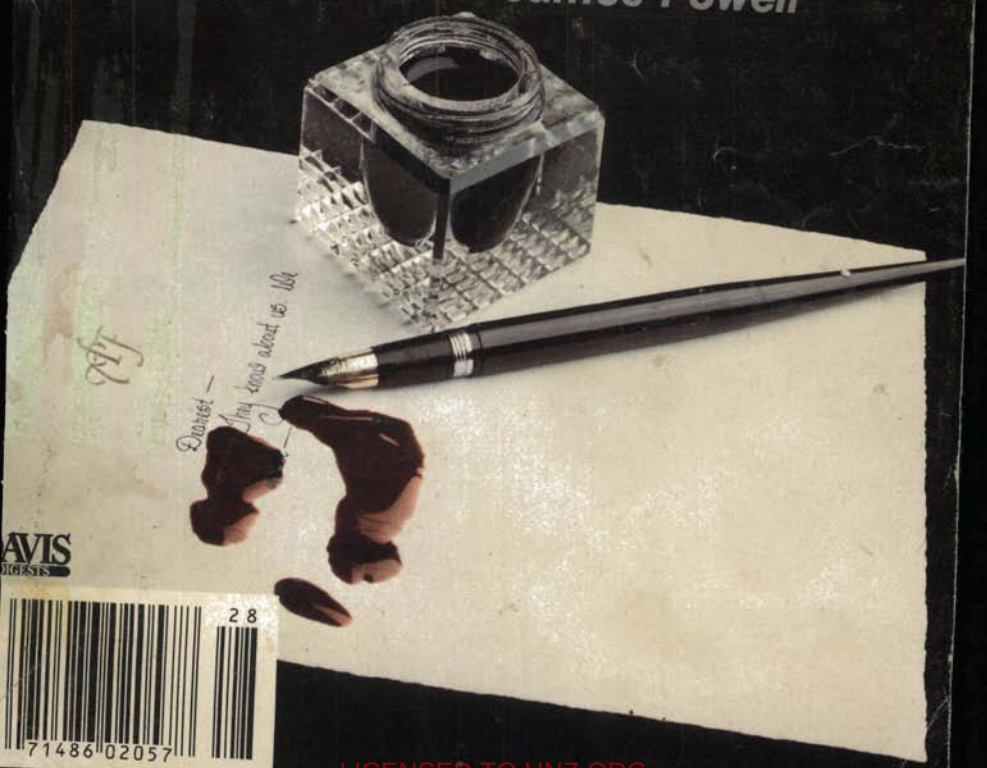

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Sam Train was a member of the San Francisco Police Force for nineteen years, then became a private investigator. Sam's cases can be fast-moving and full of action; or they can be tender and poetic; or they can be powerful and gripping. This new one has all these qualities, in different degrees, but mainly it is powerful and gripping . . .

THE BEST MAN IN TOWN

by ERNEST SAVAGE

I was in the presence of power, and discipline—and hate.

The air between me and Mrs. Catherine Vaughn was charged with those qualities, almost audibly. But I felt them as heat.

Behind her elegant patrician head, a brilliant Kandinsky hung on the wall. Before she'd entered the room—swept into the room, I should say—it had captured my eye. Now my attention was riveted on her, the Kandinsky a chromatic blur.

"He will be avenged, Mr. Train," she said. And then—in a savage pronounal shift, "*I* will have him avenged!"

She was talking about her son, Douglas, murdered five weeks ago in the fast-food outlet where he worked. She was clutching a silver-framed picture of him against her rigid chest. She had shown it to me a moment before, an improbably handsome youth of 19; in looks, the image of her—as though a clone. She was about 40, tall, wire-thin, her long regal face sternly controlled, a classic; but the eyes and mouth were haggard with grief and hate.

I said, trying to match her force, but failing, "There's a problem, Mrs. Vaughn—as I explained to your husband before you came in.

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It's an on-going police investigation. I'm a private investigator. My license doesn't permit me to—er,—to step in."

"The police have failed in their duty!"

"Not failed, Mrs. Vaughn. Just not yet succeeded."

"You cavil, Mr. Train. They've had five weeks. Since then there have been dozens of fresh murders to capture their inept attention. My son's murder will *never* be avenged except through my efforts—and yours. Mr. Taylor told me you were not only good, you were the best man in town!" Her dark eyes were ablaze.

"Mr. Taylor's problems," I said with returning strength, "were of a different order from yours." I was watching my grammar; she compelled you to. Henry Taylor, without consultation, or even warning, had recommended me to this formidable woman—a matter I would take up with him later. "Well within," I added, "the—er—parameters of my license." I don't normally use trendy words like "parameter." I was ashamed of myself, and the flattery hadn't helped.

"He told me you were a lieutenant on the San Francisco Police Force for nineteen years."

"I was on the Force for nineteen years—a lieutenant for fewer than that."

But this momentary contretemps was somewhat beside the point. Her husband—just plain Bill Vaughn—had told me before her dramatic arrival that she'd already offered a $20,000 reward for information leading to the apprehension and conviction of her son's killer, and I had been coveting for three weeks a Dong Kingman water color that I would forfeit principle, or even good sense, to own. The Kandinsky behind her head came back into focus for a moment. As I said, it had brilliance—that quality in art that captures a moment and a meaning for all time—and I understood perfectly the costly need that had put it on her wall. I would have liked it on mine; but the Kingman was becoming a more practical matter by the minute. I was sorely tempted.

Then I cautioned myself; that twenty grand would be hard to earn, most likely impossible. Bill Vaughn had given me the details of the case before his wife arrived. Their son had been shot and killed by one of two armed robbers, black, shortly after 1:00 a.m. Saturday, closing time, five weeks ago. As of this morning, Friday, when Mrs. Vaughn, encouraged by Henry Taylor, made contact with me, there had been no progress on the case. No leads, no clues, no nothing.

I told Vaughn that was to be expected, that these hit-and-run

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attacks on fast-food outlets, liquor stores, 24-hour groceries, and the like, were among the hardest to solve. He said he understood that, he said he knew the cops were doing their best, but he feared for his wife's health, her sanity, if progress wasn't made soon. He said her grief—Douglas was an only and much-loved son—had turned to a "burning, consuming lust for vengeance." It was killing her. And harrying him.

"How come," I said at that point, "Douglas was working there? I mean—" I gestured at the room, the house, one of the most luxurious I'd ever been in.

He understood. "It was at my insistence, Mr. Train. Douglas"—his eyes dropped, his hands spread ruefully—"was wickedly spoiled. My fault as much as his mother's. He'd been thrown out of every prep school that—"

"What for?"

"Ah—well, mostly indifference, a disdain for learning, a lack of discipline. He felt there was no need for him to acquire a practical education. He knew how to drive a car, sail a boat—" Vaughn stumbled to a halt, embarrassed, awkward. He looked up at me, eyes clouded. "He was inordinately handsome, charming. He felt that those assets, plus money—" He shrugged again.

"But you disagreed."

"Of course!" He straightened in his chair. "Any rational man, any father— I insisted he get a job, but the only place he was found acceptable was that fast-food place."

"When was that, Mr. Vaughn?"

"Six months ago."

"So he was good at it, apparently." I was hoping to brace him, but it backfired.

"Unfortunately," he said. And then his wife swept into the room . . .

She fascinated, awed me. If vengeance should be left to the Lord, the reason was apparent in her persona. It was indeed consuming her, blazing from her eyes. From such passion saints or devils are made—or ruined men. Behind her the Kandinsky caught my eye again, bringing me back to my own current consuming passion, the Kingman. She would sacrifice her health, her life, to hers, I would risk my license. I almost grinned at the inaptness of the comparison; but you do not grin in houses like hers. And Douglas probably hadn't either—except in defiance. I could see him a little more clearly now, rebellious, angry, vulnerable. But dead, too soon dead.

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The family money was hers, Vaughn had told me, not his; but it had been a straightforward revelation. He functioned, he said, as an investment counselor, a handy catch-all category; racetrack touts are investment counselors, too. But in the brief prelude I'd had with him, he seemed to ring true, his personal integrity intact, the shake of his hand firm and dry. But he was as unlike her as Mutt is to Jeff. He was stocky, middle-sized, and dark; she was tall, slender, and blonde. Her genes had wiped out his in the production of the beautiful boy.

He was now writing a check on the table in front of his chair. He got up and handed it to me. It was well up in four figures and I glanced at him sharply. His back was to his wife. His lips said, "Please," and God help me I put the check in my pocket.

Mrs. Vaughn's eyes flamed into mine. "You will find him," she said. It was an order, a task I must accomplish. I smiled ambiguously and got up.

The place was called The Rascal's, one of a chain of six or seven on the south side of town. It was on a busy corner, but at closing time—1:00 a.m.—the traffic had thinned and the restaurant's parking lot was empty, save for the employees' cars.

I got in just under the wire. A perky black teenage girl greeted me at the door with, "Sorry, mister, we're closing."

"I want to talk to you," I said in my cop's voice, and her face went opaque.

"Damn," she said, "more fuzz. When you guys gonna let us alone?"

"When we find out who killed him."

She closed the door behind me, showily turning the key. There were five or six other young uniformed personnel moving around the place, cleaning up, eager to split. The others were white.

"There were two men," I said to the girl. "Describe them—aside from black."

"How many more times?"

"Just this once."

"One wasn't black, like I told you, man. The big-shouldered dude was white, the one who shot him."

I had my notebook out. I flipped a page. This was news—or a racially defensive lie. Before I left Vaughn's earlier that evening I'd got all the details revealed to them by the police. There'd been no equivocation about the color of the two men, even though they'd

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been hooded and gloved. I gave her the hard eye. "What makes you think so?"

"I know so, man, but you guys don't wanna believe me. You wanna pin the whole score on the blacks."

I repeated, "What makes you think so?"

"On accounta his voice. On accounta when he told me to get my black backside into the kitchen. You don't think I can tell the difference between a black dude mouthin' off like that an' a white?"

"Everybody else," I said, "claimed they were both black."

"Everybody else is nuts. Everybody else in the place was white."

"You mean prejudiced?"

"No. I mean they couldn't tell the difference. Only I could tell the difference on accounta what he said and how he said it. I don't care what they were wearing over their heads, an' those gloves, the guy with the big shoulders was white, the skinny guy was black."

"How big was the white guy?"

"I dunno. Smaller'n you by quite a bit, but these big shoulders."

"And the black?"

"Skinny—like I said, an' shorter. Prolly starved as a kid."

I wanted to smile at her, but she wasn't ready. "What's your name?" I asked.

"Nancy. What's yours?"

"Sam. Tell me, Nancy, what did Douglas do that they shot him? Nobody else got shot, did they?"

"How many times, man—"

"Just this once more. How come Douglas got shot? Did he try to fight them?"

"Hell no, man. He was just as scared as the rest of us—more, maybe, on accounta the coke."

"Coke?"

"Coke and grass. He was dealin'. Damn, don't you cops tell each other nothin'?"

I had blocked her from rejoining the other employees. Now she moved around me, but I caught her arm, saw her wince a little. I was feeling more than my usual frustration. Normally I can get the full particulars on a case from my contact in the Department, but now I had to rely on second-hand data. Either the Department was keeping salient stuff from the Vaughns, or they were keeping it from me. I let Nancy's arm go and she rubbed it.

"Nancy," I said softly, "are you a user?"

"No. I can't afford the stuff."

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"Are you sure about Douglas?"

"I'm sure. Ask anybody—ask your buddies."

"What did he do, Nancy, this white dude—just walk up to Douglas and shoot him?"

"They made us move back in the kitchen." She pointed and I saw two of the crew staring at me coldly.

"And then they shot him?"

"This white dude."

"Just like that, the white dude shot him?"

"Just like that."

"And what did the black guy do?"

"Took the money from the register. They go for the dough."

"Nancy, did you like Douglas?"

"Man, he was cool."

"So you did like him."

"Like I said—he was cool, and he was about as good-lookin' as a honky can get."

I was ready to go; any minute now a real cop could show up. I said, meaning it, "Sorry about the arm."

"Police brutality."

"You ain't seen nothin' yet, kid."

"Don't I know."

Now I smiled at her. She was cute and tough, a survivor. "Okay, Nancy, now you can let me out of the joint."

She managed a wry grin. "About time, copper," she said, and unlocked the door. "Hey look, I hope you get 'em—boaf of 'em."

"Boaf?"

"Boaf, man." Then she showed me all her beautiful white teeth, and I thought, what a false tag "black" is. Her face was a treasure of color, a dark and lovely rose.

Henry Taylor is the quintessential businessman; he has the moral precepts of a computer; unless it can be programmed, and added to or subtracted from, it's not a true thing. He is, naturally, rich. And he has in his five-acre back yard the two finest red-clay tennis courts I've ever set foot on—which is maybe why I like him. I'm not sure.

He plays tennis every Saturday morning and he was playing that Saturday when I arrived at ten. He saw me, but continued to play. His opponent was a slack-bellied corporate type who was taking a beating. I watched Henry ace the hapless man for two final points

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while one of his three Dobermans—Princess, I thought—vacuumed my left leg before deciding it wasn't her lunch.

Henry came over and gripped my hand, a wolf-like smile on his good-looking face; he'd whipped a man. "Sam!" he said. "You've come to play."

He knows I carry tennis gear in the trunk of my car; but I said, "No. I'm here on business, Henry. Mine. Something you got me into."

"Vaughn?"

"Vaughn. Wife, husband, and son."

"Ain't she somethin', though!" He shook his head in pleased recall. "The first ten times I saw her she stopped me in my tracks."

"You wanted to own her."

"My, how perceptive you are. But second thoughts prevailed—as is infrequently the case. Her *son* owned her, Sam. I knew that at once."

"Tell me about the son, Henry. Tell me about all of them."

He suggested we go inside and drink coffee and then he went over and escorted his late victim to a car. It was a cool morning, a high thin fog still clinging to the tops of the trees. A perfect morning for tennis; and suddenly second thoughts loomed large in my mind. I didn't like the Vaughn case. It was dangerous. I'd already impersonated a cop, and dope had entered the scene—tricky, ubiquitous dope.

I still had Vaughn's check for several thousand dollars in my pocket—a "retainer," he'd tactfully called it, and a giant step toward the coveted Kingman, even if I didn't bring Douglas' killer to heel. But it was burning there.

Q: Was Douglas killed by someone in the dope trade, or was it just random bad luck?

A: Neither made much sense.

Q: Was Nancy right that the killer was a white man?

A: Her premise was thin; and all the white kids on the crew were evidently just as sure he wasn't. Neither man had shown any skin.

Q: But what if he *was* white—why the elaborate camouflage? Preparations on that order or care are usually for bigger game, higher stakes. Most fast-food hits are impromptu capers—a couple of runny-nosed users, wrenched with stomach cramps, scoring for a fix. And why kill Douglas? It had the smell of an execution—but at nineteen he couldn't have risen threateningly high in the dope game.

Princess was allowing me to stroke her head and since she seemed

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to want me to I thought I'd better. Nice doggy. Taylor was still saying goodbye to his friend. This afternoon I could mail the check back to the Vaughns and spend the rest of the morning whipping (probably) Taylor's piratical behind. And then go buy some nice reproduction for that alluring space on my living-room wall. No way. You develop this taste, this fine and noble hunger; you feed it well or it bites your throat. Besides, Douglas shouldn't have died; his death fitted no clear pattern.

Taylor served the coffee himself—a touch of *noblesse oblige*. Either that or he'd fired his endlessly suffering kitchen staff again. I've seldom seen the same face twice here; he's tough to work for. Watching him pour, a piece of belated inductive reasoning fell my way: Bill Vaughn did not necessarily have to be Douglas' biological father. In fact, it seemed highly improbable. You can fool Mother Nature some of the time, but not in the genetic swirl. Some trace of him surely would have shown up in the son. So—?

I poured cream and asked Henry, "How long have you known the Vaughns?"

"Ever since they moved into that place down the road—about fifteen years." He grinned, perfectly at ease with himself as he added, "I always smell new money coming to town, Sam."

"And skim some off, no doubt. Where did they come from?"

"Chicago. Meat-packing and real-estate money in her background."

"And his?"

"Son of a Gary, Indiana steel puddler, or something like that. Self-educated, a boot-strap type, like me. Smart as a ferret in the marketplace, though."

"Like you. But the money's hers, you say."

"So?" He shrugged. "Some people play for the love of the game, some for the winnings. He's content to sit on her winnings—but the few moves I've seen him make were shrewd."

"He's not Douglas' father, is he?"

Taylor's brows shot up. "By golly," he said, clearly surprised at the idea, "I'll bet he isn't. As unlike as coal and snow, aren't they? *Weren't* they?"

"So—another father, presumably. A first husband—or a lover."

"No doubt of it."

"Henry, do you know anything more about her background?"

"No more than I've said."

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"Can you pinpoint when they got here—or left there, rather?"

"Why this line, Sam?"

"I'm looking for a new trail to follow. The ones I've got go nowhere—or have the wrong smell. How old was Douglas when they got here?"

Taylor frowned, pondering. "Ah," he said finally. "Yes, the kid was a baby—so it would be more like seventeen-eighteen years ago. My how time flies when you're making money."

"I'm sure. And if the present Mr. Vaughn isn't the father, their last year in Chicago must have been eventful. Divorce, remarriage?"

"Very likely, Sam. There *was* something, come to think of it. She had that air about her at first—a tragic figure, most beguiling, as I said. Maybe it wasn't a divorce, maybe it was a death."

"Husband Number One dies and Bill Vaughn, the steel-puddler's son, picks her up on the bounce?"

"You don't think it's likely, but you don't know Vaughn as well as I do."

"He seemed natural to me, unemphatic, like a well-trained houseman."

"Maybe that's what she wanted, an attendant, not a lover. But Bill's no pushover."

We'd gone too far afield, following random spoors. Douglas had been shot in the course of a routine stickup. Or he'd been executed for misplaying his role in the world of dope. An occasional killing is marvelously disciplinary on the rest of the players in the game. But I still could not buy that—he hadn't been in it long enough to threaten the big guys. A red herring, I thought.

Thus the mind rambles; and so I said more sharply than necessary, "Neither are you a pushover, Henry. But you can do me a favor."

"Like what?" He was lighting one of his two-dollar cigars, smoke coming out of both sides of his mouth, as talk sometimes does.

"You got me into this, so to speak. You can help get me out."

"How?"

"Make a phone call to Chicago—to someone you know there and maybe own a piece of."

"What for?"

"Have him find out whether it was a divorce or a death twenty years ago."

The smoke was thick now, a cloud of it roiling high. "What," he said, "would that have to do with Douglas' murder?"

"I don't know. But he was killed because of what he was—and I

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don't know what he was. The more I know about him, the more I'm apt to understand why he died."

"Fooey! He was killed by a stickup man."

"No. That would make it a chance killing and I'd have to get off the case. The cops seldom solve chance killings, and if they can't, I sure as hell can't. So I have to assume it was something else. In fact, I'm sure it was."

"Like what?"

"I don't know. That's why I'm scratching around." I didn't mention the dope angle because it too would lead me nowhere. A moment ago I'd thought, red herring. But if so, who'd laid it there? "Make the call," I said.

He grinned happily; in his world a request is mother of a deal. "And you'll do what for me?"

"Keep my mouth shut about items A, B, and C. Make the call."

He laughed, and it rang true, even though he knew I was privy to a number of things he'd not like the world to know, half an alphabet's worth. His eyes glittered. "Play me a couple of sets. Best two out of three."

"After you make the call."

The same stout capable-looking maid let me in as she had the night before and showed me to the same room, where I spent ten minutes alone with the Kandinsky. I was still tempering down from three hard sets of tennis and the shower that followed, ends of my hair damp, my legs still tight. I don't do it often enough.

She came in alone and I stood and we looked at each other for fifteen—count 'em—seconds. "Mr. Vaughn is in town," she said finally to break the mystical moment. I was thinking medieval thoughts: she was Elaine, Guinevere, a princess in trouble.

But I understood her better now; I had learned things. Her first husband had killed a man for a classic reason—perhaps the best there is: Douglas was that dead man's son, allegedly anyway. A scandal to captivate Chicago society twenty years ago—Taylor's friend in that lusty town had enjoyed recalling it. The first husband given twenty years to life for the murder, divorce following the trial, marriage to Vaughn following the divorce, removal then to here, fleeing the scene. A classic tragedy, a classic woman standing before me, and the end result of all that turmoil dead himself, his mother's heart worn thin and fragile as Belleek. I felt protective.

She said, "You've discovered something, Mr. Train?" She

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sat—descended into a chair. I sat clumsily, wondering what to say first, sorry I'd turned that Chicago stone—but there it was, wormy with portents.

"Douglas' father," I said softly, "must have been a handsome man."

If she flickered, I missed it. "He was."

A lover to lure this lady into a losing game, he restfully in his twenty-year grave. I wondered—did she still think it was worth it, that white-hot passion, that moment? Or had she ever? What to say next?

"Did you know, Mrs. Vaughn, that Douglas was involved with drugs?"

Her chin raised a quarter inch. "The police alleged that. They are, of course, quite wrong."

And would remain so forever. This was futile, but I was locked in my chair, the worms under the Chicago stone wriggling in their newfound light. "Did you know," I said, "that the man who killed him was white?"

She flickered then. "No, I did not know that, Mr. Train. The police— Are you sure?"

"Almost certain—an unimpeachable source."

"Why didn't the police tell us that?"

"They're less sure than I am. In fact, they think both men were black."

"Is that—do you consider that—a lead, a clue?"

Since about an hour ago, I thought; but I said, "Possibly," my eyes dropping. I wished her husband was there; I could—I thought—speak more openly with him, examine more possibilities. Moreover, I thought this lovely suffering woman was in danger, but I loathed to tell her that. She appeared to be dying before my very eyes, evanescing into pure spirit. I felt I was in a closely timed race, several of the runners unidentified. "When," I said, "do you expect your husband home?"

"Later this afternoon. Do you find me difficult to talk to, Mr. Train?"

"Yes."

She smiled—a subtlety of lines perhaps da Vinci could have caught. "But you need not fear offending or shocking me, sir. I'm quite beyond that. Last night I was impassioned in my plea—my demand—that you avenge my son's death. Today I'm quite content that you will. I have the utmost confidence in you and will cooperate in any way that I can."

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"Even if I suggest you go hide out somewhere?"

"Hide out?"

"Leave town—go visit a trusted friend."

"I no longer have trusted friends. But what are you—"

"It's possible you're in danger, Mrs. Vaughn. Probable. In fact, I think it's certain."

"I cannot imagine from what source, Mr. Train."

"I can—but I've got a trained imagination. Consider this, Mrs. Vaughn: your first husband murdered your lover, Douglas' father. He got twenty years to life for the deed, roughly twenty years ago. Assume he's out of jail now, paranoid, embittered." I had commanded my eyes to stay fixed on hers, but I was gulping for air as I blundered on. "Assume he wanted vengeance—the way you do. Who would he attack first?"

"Me." She hadn't flickered.

"No. Douglas, Mrs. Vaughn. Why? To make you suffer—as you have done. To make you pay, to afflict you with mortal pain and make it last." I took a deep breath, watching. Her spine stiffened, the calm hands in her lap rearranged themselves. "Douglas was a counter, a pawn in the game. You're the queen."

She seemed scarcely to breathe. "But why so long? Six weeks. Why so long?"

"Have you suffered? Are you hurting?"

"Ah—"

"I think he's out there—watching, measuring, rejoicing in it. I think—"

"That he will kill me next."

"You know him better than anyone—would he?"

"Oh, yes—yes! Phillip." Now she breathed, two great intakes of air.

His name was Phillip Mason, but that is all I knew about him for sure. The rest was conjecture, now confirmed by this lovely lady's body language, by her visible physical panic. Her hands were now entwined, white-knuckled. She knew her man.

She was staring at me, for the first time, discomposed. "But how did you learn these things?"

"Does it matter?"

"No, of course not."

"I've got these friends," I said. "A lady—like yourself—and a good strong man. She's blind, but that doesn't matter. They will take you in, Al and Emily Brattles."

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"But—"

"No buts, Mrs. Vaughn. Go pack a bag. I'm getting panicky, I just scared myself. I want you out of here in twenty minutes."

The phone rang, and not unexpectedly it was Bill Vaughn. An hour ago, at four o'clock, I'd delivered his wife to the Brattles' house, a big old Queen Anne with a stunning view of the Bay, proper refuge for a lady.

"Train, where's my wife? I come home and find her gone. The maid said she left with you, bag in hand."

"So she did."

"Where is she? Listen, we hired you to—"

"She's staying with friends of mine, Bill."

"Who? Where?"

I closed my eyes and said firmly, "She doesn't want you to know."

"What! That's preposterous!"

"That's what she said."

"Train, there's something wrong here. I know she's frightened and upset, but—"

"Frightened? Why frightened, Bill?"

"All right, I didn't mean that. I meant—"

"But that's what you said, Bill. Why frightened?"

He paused this time, then came back strong, and I remembered Taylor's appraisal of him, tougher than he looked. "I don't know what you're up to," he growled, "but if you don't tell me *right now* where my wife is, I'll call the police."

"I'll make a deal," I said. "I'll tell you where she is if you tell me where Phil Mason is. Then *I* can call the police."

"Train, you're a damned meddling fool! If I had known—"

"You hired me, Bill."

"If I had known you'd *kidnap* my wife, for God's sake, I'd've—"

"What?"

"She's there, isn't she?" he said slyly. "Let me talk to her."

I suppressed a laugh, then let it dribble through. It didn't sound convincing. "Can you imagine your wife holed up with a shamus? You're a damn fool, Vaughn." I hoped my voice rang false. "Look, I've got no time for nonsense. When there's something to report I'll get in touch." I covered the phone for a count of three; sound would go dead in his ear. Then I said before hanging up abruptly, "I'll take care of your wife, don't worry about her."

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I made myself a drink, a couple of inches of J & B in a tall glass, soda, two ice cubes only. I don't like it frozen stiff, the taste stunned.

It was 5:30 and he would come, or he wouldn't. I was either right, or I was wrong. The only sure thing is that my legs ached and Scotch is Scotch is Scotch. Taylor had played me hard this morning—but he always does. We'd split the first two sets and I gave him the third because he was paying for the expensive long-distance calls to Chicago. Or so I told myself. Phillip Mason. He would come.

Mason had been a moneyless upper-class Chicagoan who'd married a rich upper-class Chicagoan, Catherine. A love match, they'd called it; dynamite as it turned out two years later. You could assume he was a violent man—look at the record. And as jealous as water is of fire. Had she been driven to her adultery, or drawn to it? Maybe Mason was sterile, impotent. Who knows? But he was out of jail now, and he'd been guided in his new freedom to here, to The Rascal's five weeks ago, to Douglas.

You brood in jail. You work a little, you play a little handball, you plot and plan, but mostly you brood. You dream bloody acts of vengeance. You were wronged and somebody has to pay. After twenty years, you're insane. You've got just one thing to do: put your dream to rest.

We get TV news here from five o'clock until—it seems—eleven. Compulsively I watch the stuff, an hour or two anyway, in a growing rage. But I didn't that night. Instead, I sat in a chair facing the door, left unlocked, with my trusty old Walther at hand, and sorted through news of my own. The three Chicago calls, one before and two after the tennis games, had hit the jackpot: Mason had been released four months ago, was wanted already for parole violation. No present known address. Three earlier appeals for parole had been rejected; he was now 46, bald, had a knife-wound scar on his left cheek from a prison brawl; had no known friends or associates.

But you can sort through fresh and untested data just so long. Lately I'd been rereading a Willa Cather novel, *My Antonia*, a classic, a charmer. At six o'clock I picked it up, at eight put it down, the last couple of hours paid over to a simpler past. Nothing unusual had happened in the real world. Outside my windows, one floor down, Van Ness traffic was revving up for a typical Saturday night, two interlacing strands of siren music already plying the air.

I'd drawn the shades over the windows, as one would if housing a runaway guest, or kidnapee. I wanted to lure him into my den, I

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wanted it over. Mason was the only figure in the case who brought all its strands together, and I was at their nexus, waiting.

At a little after nine my phone rang. It was Al Brattles, sounding breathless. He said something was wrong with Mrs. Vaughn.

"What?"

"I don't know, Sam. She—well, she just sits there. Won't talk, won't move, won't do nothin'. I—"

"I'll be right over," I said.

It was not a risk I'd planned on—that she might go catatonic, which is what it sounded like. A total retreat from her shattered world—and I'd brought it on. I hurried out, locking the door, but leaving a light on. Why, God alone knows.

She was in a comfortably upholstered wingback chair in my favorite room in all this town. From the big front window the Bay is laid out for you like a private show, at night, enchantingly lit. But she was beyond such simple entertainments, or anything else.

Her eyes were wide-open, but glazed with inward sight. Her hands, clutching the arms of the chair, were rigid, her feet planted on the floor like posts.

"A bloody statue," Al whispered in my ear as I stared at her. "She just sort of slipped into it, Sam. We thought she was resting." He looked worried and concerned, somehow having muffed a host's first duty—keep your guest from going nuts. The right-hand pocket of his old tweed jacket was lumpy with the Smith & Wesson .38 he'd shoved there when I brought her over. No guest in the Brattles' house will be molested by a dicey outside world, his creed; but her inside world had collapsed. "I called Emily's doctor," he said aloud. "He should be here anytime."

"Is he a shrink?"

"For Emily? No. But he'll know who to call. It's whatchamacallit, isn't it, Sam—where they just freeze up and stay that way?"

"It looks like it." I stood up straight and sighed and Al stepped across the lovely room to the bar to make drinks. Emily was in the kitchen fixing something to eat. Her being blind, you never know what it will be, or sometimes what it is.

She came in then with a tray, striding—as was her proud habit—to the coffee table in front of the couch, and set it down without a hitch. She's been totally blind for only a little more than a year and this is the house she was born in. She knows it to the last quarter inch.

The doorbell rang and Emily looked across the room squarely at

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Al, guided by the heart's radar. "Dr. Hanley," she said, and Al, drink in hand, took off for the stairs to go down and let him in. "Sam," she said to me, "eat. I'm not sure how it looks, but it smells good. Is she still—?" She gestured toward the silent Mrs. Vaughn.

"Yes, she's still—"

Then we heard the shots, four of them in a nearly rhythmic sequence, and Emily made for the stairs at a dead run, screaming, "No!" I caught her at the top step and held her there, looking down. Like a damn fool, I'd left my Walther at home.

Emily struggled, but I held her down hard on the stairs and told her to stay there, as enraged with myself as I've ever been. Best man in town—you bet!

Then I went down the stairs two at a time, made the left-hand turn at the bottom, and saw two bodies down on the floor, the more distant one already struggling to his knees. In the dimly lit hall I was unsure at first which one it was, but when he muttered, "Damn it, the filthy swine tried to kill me!" I knew and began breathing again.

Brattles had been winged—a crease on his upper-left bicep—and the mirror on the back wall of the entry hall was shattered. But Vaughn was dead, two shots through the chest near the heart. *Vaughn!* I had turned his body over and pulled the mask off his face, expecting to see a scar on his left cheek, and for a long moment was stunned into silence. *Vaughn!* Of course, I said to myself finally, of course; he had waited outside my place and followed me. The best man in town indeed.

"Thank God," Brattles said, "that I'm a drinking man." He had taken off his shirt and was looking at his wound with rueful pride. "When I saw the gun in his hand, I sloshed the Scotch in his face. It threw his shots off. I'll endorse that brand any old time."

Emily had come down the stairs and was holding Al's right arm in a fierce proprietary grip. I had turned on the hall light. The front door was still open, and framed in it now was Dr. Hanley, gazing raptly at the scene, nose sniffing the cordite-laden air. "Where," he said, "is the sick woman? Or have I got the wrong address?"

Technically, it should have been Al's twenty grand; but the point was academic. Vaughn had told me his wife had posted the reward, but she had apparently merely intended to, or he'd made the whole thing up. And Mrs. Vaughn—ten days later—had settled into a

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comfortable schizoid womb, from which she might never emerge. As who could blame her?

But I did get Vaughn's "retainer" check through his account first thing Monday morning before probate could clamp a hold on the last family buck. I did not, however, cash it without a touch of chagrin. Al's rue in gazing at his wound was overmatched by mine, and unleavened with pride. I suppose I should have known, or at least sensed it, but the humbling truth is that I didn't. And I will suggest forcefully to Taylor that he quit touting me as the best man in town.

The bullet dug out from behind the Brattles' mirror matched the one taken from Douglas' body. And of course it was soon shown that Vaughn would have been the sole heir after his wife's death.

Mason is still missing, as far as I know. My guess is that Vaughn paid him enough to leave the country, or, more likely still, killed him or had him killed. But it's clear that Vaughn waited to make his murderous moves until Mason was out of jail and in line as Suspect Number One if something went wrong. That's my private theory, not the cops', who know as little about all this as I could get away with telling them.

The man who'd accompanied Vaughn the night of Douglas' murder is still an unknown, and will probably remain one. Men like him are for hire on too many street corners of this town. Men of any color.

And one more privately held idea: Vaughn had probably financed Douglas' brief foray into dope—the second red herring, Mason himself being the first. But on that fatal Saturday night Vaughn had got as impatient as I had got careless, and if Brattles had not met him at the front door, drink in hand, gun in pocket, the body count would have gone up by four. Five, if you throw in Dr. Hanley, who would have been making his last house call.

Now last but not least: seven days ago when I went into the gallery where the Kingman was much too attractively displayed, intending to negotiate a half-down-the-rest-later purchase of the beautiful thing, it had been sold.

A man is rich in proportion to the things he can do without. Thoreau said that, and if he could live with it, maybe I'll yet learn to. Meanwhile, back to Willa Cather, et al. The walls of your mind need furnishing too.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

JACK RITCHIE

Albert had never failed his employers. But when is a hit not a hit?

BODY CHECK

by JACK RITCHIE

I had come to pick up my $20,000 for services rendered.

Jessop rubbed his jaw.

I waited. "Is there anything wrong?"

"Well, there's been absolutely no verification."

"Verification?"

"No verification that Douglas Lazenwell is dead."

I chuckled. "For a second there you had me worried, Henry. Of course Lazenwell is dead."

"There has not been one word to that effect in the media, Albert. Not one word."

I gave that some thought. I had killed Lazenwell early Saturday evening. That meant that his body must certainly have been discovered at least by Sunday morning. Today was Monday. "Nothing's in this morning's newspaper?"

"Nothing."

"It's *bound* to appear in this afternoon's paper."

"Perhaps, Albert. But we live in swifter times and I was referring to television. There was no mention of Lazenwell's death at any time on yesterday's news programs. Nor this morning. And when a man like Douglas Lazenwell is murdered, it should certainly get into the news."

I agreed. Everyone knew—though no one had been able to prove—that the source of Lazenwell's considerable income came

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from importing commodities from nations where poppy fields are unblushingly considered as part of the Gross National Product.

"Are you *positive* you killed him, Albert?"

"Positive. One clean shot. And I checked immediately to make certain he was dead before I left. You know how careful I am."

I had been waiting in the closet of Lazenwell's master bedroom with the door slightly ajar. Lazenwell had entered the room and switched on the lights. I had let him close the door behind him before I fired.

I had then stepped out of the closet, ascertained that my bullet had done its job, and then departed the way I had come, via the French windows.

Jessop wiped his glasses. "Perhaps he was wearing a bullet-proof vest, or some protection of that nature, and merely feigned death?"

"No. I know a dead man when I see one, Henry. He could not have fooled me."

"Could the victim have been some kind of stand-in? It's been done before, you know. Someone hired by Lazenwell to substitute for him on occasions."

I pondered. I had never actually met Lazenwell in the flesh before Saturday night. "Even if I shot the wrong man, Henry, the fact still remains that I *did* kill somebody. Surely that would have gotten into the news broadcasts even if the body wasn't Lazenwell's."

Jessop agreed. "Perhaps the body—whoever it is—just hasn't been discovered yet?"

I rubbed my jaw. "I killed Lazenwell on Saturday evening. When he failed to make an appearance on Sunday morning, perhaps his servants assumed that he had gone off somewhere for a day or two and felt no obligation to keep them informed about his whereabouts. There's a good possibility that his body is still lying up there waiting to be discovered."

Jessop nodded. "That's probably it. Somebody's bound to find his body before very long. Perhaps it was even done this morning. We should read about it in this afternoon's newspaper or hear it on the news." He cleared his throat. "However, Albert, I'm afraid that I can't give you your money until we have that verification. Rules are rules, you know, and I can't make exceptions."

He was right, of course. However, I did need the money badly. When I first embarked on my career—rather late in life—I had not exactly expected to reap riches, yet I had supposed I would earn a comfortable living.

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In a manner of speaking, I had. I averaged two assignments per year.

The key word, however, is "averaged." My income could by no means be considered steady. As a matter of fact, before I had received the Lazenwell assignment, there had been a hiatus of nearly eleven months and I was strained for funds.

Jessop read my mind. "It's your own fault, Albert. If you weren't so particular about your assignments, I could throw a lot more work your way."

Yes, I have my conditions—my ethics, if you will. I do not kill willy-nilly. My victims must fully deserve to die, at least by my standards, and I do not take borderline cases.

After I left Jessop, I returned to my apartment to await the afternoon newspaper. When it came, it carried not one word about Lazenwell's death, or the death of anyone at the Lazenwell residence. The afternoon TV news broadcasts yielded nothing either.

I began to worry. Even if the servants believed that Lazenwell had departed for a few days, surely one of them, a maid perhaps, would at least have entered his bedroom on Sunday morning if only to make the bed or change the sheets. Had she simply been neglecting her duty?

It was time to put a fire under the pot.

I checked my notebook for Lazenwell's home phone number and dialed.

A man answered.

A butler, perhaps? Did people still have butlers these days? "Could I speak to Mr. Lazenwell?"

"I'm sorry, sir, but Mr. Lazenwell isn't home at present."

I was tempted to direct him to look into Lazenwell's bedroom. However I said, "Where could I get in touch with him?"

"I'm afraid he left me no information beyond the fact that he intended to be in New York for a few days."

"When did he leave?"

"Saturday night, sir."

"Did you actually *see* him leave?"

There was a pause. "Who is this speaking, sir?"

My research on Lazenwell had indicated that he dabbled a bit in paintings. "My name is Alonzo Jennings," I said. "Of the Jennings Galleries."

"Jennings Galleries, sir? I don't remember Mr. Lazenwell ever mentioning the Jennings Galleries."

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Why the devil should a butler think that he should be privy to Lazenwell's knowledge of galleries? "Just who am I talking to?"

"My name is Franklin, sir. Mr. Lazenwell's personal secretary."

Ah, yes. Now I remembered my notes. William Franklin. He had been Lazenwell's personal secretary for some fifteen years. He probably knew as much about Lazenwell's business as Lazenwell did himself.

"My galleries are in San Francisco," I said, choosing a city sufficiently removed. "I've never had the pleasure of doing business with Mr. Lazenwell before, but some of my colleagues have mentioned his collection. I thought he might be interested in several Modiglianis I've acquired."

There was a pause. "You sell, and *buy*, paintings?"

"Of course."

"Are you calling from San Francisco?"

"No. I'm phoning from the airport. I'll be in town for just a few hours. So if it isn't too much trouble, would you just check the house on the off chance that Mr. Lazenwell has returned without you knowing it?"

There was another pause. "Mr. Lazenwell is not interested in purchasing any more paintings. As a matter of fact, he has decided to dispose of his collection."

"Oh?"

"Yes, he has decided to sell his paintings. All of them. Would you be in the market to buy?"

I thought that over for a few moments. "I just might be at that. If the price is right, of course. Are you certain that Mr. Lazenwell wants to sell?"

"Positive, sir."

"But you don't know where Mr. Lazenwell is at the moment? You can't get him to the phone?"

"That won't be necessary, sir."

"Why won't it be necessary?"

"If you are really interested in the paintings, I can handle the matter for you. Mr. Lazenwell has authorized me to sell them if the opportunity presents itself and he is not here."

I smiled. "Do you have all that in writing?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right then. How would it be if I dropped over there right now?"

"Just fine, sir. I'll be waiting."

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When I hung up, I phoned for a taxi. It took me to the far east side along the lake and eventually it turned into a curving driveway which ended before Lazenwell's huge French Norman residence. The cab parked in the oval behind a large van on the side of which was lettered the information *Rossiter—Fine Furniture.*

Franklin had evidently been watching and waiting because the front door opened immediately as I approached it.

He was a rather tall man in his late forties with a worried look on his face. He immediately produced a twice-folded crisp sheet of paper.

The typing informed me that Franklin had been given full authority to sell the paintings. The signature at the bottom of the page read *Douglas Lazenwell.*

I returned the sheet. "Shall we see the paintings?"

It appeared that Lazenwell had them on display in various rooms, rather than concentrating them all in one place.

We stopped in the library first.

Frankly, I know almost nothing whatsoever about paintings. However, I gazed at the frame before me and said, "Ah, yes," thoughtfully. "How much is Mr. Lazenwell asking for this one?"

"He paid $30,000 for it, sir."

I chuckled. "$30,000?" I shook my head. "The best I could possibly offer is $15,000."

He tried once. "$20,000?"

I remained adamant. "$15,000. Not one cent more."

He agreed. "Very well, sir, the painting is yours."

As we walked on to the next painting, we had to step aside for two men in work uniforms carrying a sofa.

Franklin felt obliged to explain. "I'm sending some of the furniture out to be re-upholstered."

We stopped in front of another painting.

"$25,000," Franklin said.

"$15,000."

He pondered a moment. "Sold."

After I had, figuratively at least, spent some $100,000, we went upstairs to the second floor, yielding once again to the same two men, this time each carrying down a heavy elaborate chair. To my unpracticed eye the upholstery appeared to be in excellent condition.

We confronted a painting in the hallway.

"$18,000," Franklin said.

I smiled. "Are you selling anything else, Franklin?"

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"Else? You mean more paintings? Yes, the entire collection."

"I mean besides the paintings *and* the furniture. How about automobiles? Perhaps there are several in the garages that you wish to dispose of?"

He regarded me speculatively. "As a matter of fact, there is a Porsche I think might interest you."

"Franklin," I said. "Sit down."

He stared at me for a few seconds and then sank into one of the hall chairs.

"Franklin, we *both* know that Lazenwell is dead. I know he is dead because I shot him and you know he is dead because you found the body and are now taking immediate advantage of his death."

Franklin's eyes flickered warily.

"Let us put our cards on the table," I said. "You intend to sell Lazenwell's paintings, his furniture, his automobiles, whatever you can and just as swiftly as you can and then disappear with the money. Isn't that right?"

He said nothing.

"But that isn't very intelligent, Franklin. Not intelligent at all. When the police enter this case, as of course they will, they will find a stripped house. And putting two and two together, including your disappearance, they will not only conclude that it was you who did the looting, but also that you must be the man who killed Lazenwell. Every policeman in the country will be looking for you."

Franklin swallowed.

"Franklin, for this immediate gain—this chicken feed—you are not only risking a murder rap, but you are also passing up the *real* money."

"Real money?"

"Yes, the *real* money. Franklin, you have been Lazenwell's personal secretary for over fifteen years, have you not? And I don't think that you could have held that position for so long if he hadn't trusted you implicitly."

Franklin admitted to that.

"And certainly you must know every bit of Lazenwell's business? I rather imagine that on numerous occasions when he was either too busy, or unavailable, or simply didn't want to be bothered, he even let you sign his name to letters? Documents? Possibly even checks? And surely during all those years you must have learned to duplicate his signature so well that no one ever questioned it? Where did Lazenwell put his money, Franklin? Swiss banks?"

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He licked his lips. "No. Swiss banks these days do not pay interest on secret numbered accounts. They actually charge yearly for the privilege of depositing. Mr. Lazenwell would have none of that."

"Then perhaps Bermuda? The Bahamas?" I smiled. "I would venture to say that Lazenwell has even trusted you to such an extent that on various occasions you even personally conveyed his funds to their overseas destinations? You were known as his deputy, his representative, his emissary? Did you not make deposits? Transfers? Even *withdrawals* without undue trouble?"

He hesitated and then admitted it. "Yes."

"Franklin, what you now need is *time*. Time to travel. Time to make withdrawals. But you obviously will not get that time if the world learns that Lazenwell is dead."

I sat down opposite him. "Franklin, there is no way you can keep Lazenwell's death a secret for more than a day or two more. And I suspect you realize that and that is why you are scooping up everything within sight. The people who employ me want their friends, their enemies, and especially their own employees to know that Lazenwell has transgressed syndicate rules and that punishment has been swift and sure. They will want this known *or* they will want a very good explanation from me as to why Lazenwell's body has not yet been discovered. What have you done with it? I hope you haven't buried it?"

He shook his head. "No."

"Good. It belongs in the freezer." I hitched my chair closer. "Franklin, I will now go back to my employers and inform them that by mistake I shot and killed Lazenwell's stand-in. Lazenwell, now realizing that there is a contract out on him, has hidden that body somewhere to create confusion and allow him time to escape. However, I have several strong clues as to where he might be hiding and I will proceed immediately to seek him out and kill him. And the syndicate will grant me an extension of time because I have never failed them before. The syndicate knows that I will deliver.

"And so for two or three weeks I shall 'pursue' Lazenwell from one point to another and even send back reports. You too will be traveling, but on other business. I don't know how much money you will be able to acquire, Franklin. I leave that up to your industry and ingenuity. But my fee for providing you with the time to act is a flat one hundred thousand dollars."

He shifted slightly in his chair.

"And when you are through with your mission, Franklin, I will

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remove Lazenwell's body from the freezer, thaw it out, and transport it several hundred miles to some country road where it should be found a day or two later.

"When the police investigate, they will find all of Lazenwell's visible assets still here and intact—his paintings, his furniture, his automobiles. Everything. And they will find you wondering fretfully why you haven't heard from him for such a long time. They will, of course, suspect that Lazenwell had foreign bank accounts, but they will not know where, or how many. You will not have to flee as a pursued murderer, Franklin. You will be able to retire somewhere to spend your money without having to resort to the fugitive life."

Franklin wiped his forehead and rose. He went to one of the doors down the hallway—the door to Lazenwell's bedroom—hesitated a moment, then turned the knob. He did not step into the room.

I joined him in the doorway.

Lazenwell lay on the floor inside, exactly as I had left him Saturday evening, except that now the blood was dry.

I chided Franklin. "You shouldn't have left him just lying there. Someone else might have stumbled on the body."

Franklin seemed shaken. "I didn't even know that he was here, that he was dead."

I blinked and then stared at him. "You mean that he's been lying there since Saturday night and that nobody—"

Franklin nodded. "Saturday evening he went upstairs to pack a small suitcase. He really was leaving for a few days in New York. When I didn't see him again that night, I assumed that he had left. There was no reason for me or anyone else to go up to his bedroom since, as far as anyone in the house knew, he hadn't even slept in his bed that night."

I was aghast. "But the paintings and the prices at which you were willing to let them go? And the furniture, the Porsche—"

He smiled faintly. "I asked outrageous prices and was perfectly happy to settle for one-half or one-third. And I really *am* empowered to sell the paintings, you know. The document I showed you was no forgery. As for the furniture, Mr. Lazenwell was having it redone because he tired of the old fabric colors and designs. And the Porsche has given him nothing but trouble since he acquired it and I knew that he would be more than happy to get rid of it if he got a fair price."

I closed my eyes. I had never been so embarrassed in my life. Here

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I had been going on and on, assuming that Franklin had been cold-bloodedly looting the house after concealing Lazenwell's—

Really, most embarrassing. And dangerous. This new Franklin now simply knew too much. He was a threat. Why hadn't I brought my revolver with me? Would I have to strangle him? Was I strong enough for something as physical as that?

I opened my eyes to find Franklin still smiling. Broadly.

Our eyes locked and it took me ten seconds to realize that actually we were still in business.

I smiled too and then we carried Lazenwell's body down the back stairs to the basement. We locked it securely in a chest freezer and I pocketed the only keys.

I traveled at Franklin's side and at his shoulder whenever he made one of his withdrawals.

We split nearly three million.

Down the middle. Fifty-fifty.

After all, it *was* my idea.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

PRO AND CON

by ELIOT SPALDING

The pro hit the bank before dawn,
Rifled the vault and was gone.
But his skill mattered not,
He was speedily caught,
And now the old pro is a con.

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The thought of reaching the age of 100 tickled Abigail. She had only six years to go, but there were problems. The heat, also reaching for 100, was only one of them . . .

THE OLD LADY KEEPS COOL

by MARY AMLAW

The sun came up like a giant blister in the cloudless sky. Abigail watched it through the uncurtained window by her bed. "Goin' to be another scorcher," she told the oval portrait of her long-dead husband. He smiled benignly on her, captured forever in his prime, the ends of his walrus mustache gilded by the morning sun as it splashed her untidy bed with light. Tom Junior had done that painting of his pa shortly before the world had gone insane. The painting of old Tom was young Tom's apology for going off to war, and in it Abigail had all that was left of her two men.

"I'm not up to hot weather like I used to be," she told Tom's picture. "Two, three years back it went to 87 degrees three days running. Near did me in. Last three days've been reaching for 100. Folks are dropping like flies in town, young Jimmy says."

The sun flooded Tom's face, blurring the painted features. Abigail sighed. Hot weather kept her from sleeping. Last night she had just dozed off when the moon woke her, shining in with a more golden light than normal, as if the day's heat had burned it. Her pillow felt wet and she had to hoist herself up to turn it over. Then the sheets tangled damp and heavy around her legs. She was just dozing off again when the sun burst in, puckering the very walls with its heat.

Abigail clutched the edge of her mattress with both hands and pushed until she was upright, with her bare soles resting on the wooden floor. "Have to be careful," she explained to Tom. "That time I fell six years back, Phyllis nearly had me shut up in a nursing home for good. She's a good granddaughter, Tom, but she frets too much." Sometimes, when Abigail drifted into tales of the old days, Phyllis and young Jimmy eyed her as if she'd gone daft. "And maybe

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I am," she told Tom as she sat on the edge of the bed. "But I'd be a lot more daft shut up in a home, that I know."

Abigail gripped the back of the rocker near her bed, braced herself against it, and hauled herself to her feet. "Being up, that's not so hard," she told Tom as she picked her way from rocker to chair, to wall, to door frame. "Hard part is getting up. But I'll see my hundredth birthday yet, Tom. Give Phyllis and Jimmy a story to tell their whole lives long."

She hobbled into the bathroom to clean up. The thought of reaching 100 tickled her. Only six years left, and she came of hardy stock. She still had most of her own teeth and the digestion of a goat, and her heart was sound.

"And aren't I descended from the Mt. Desert widow, Asbell Gamble herself?" Abigail challenged Tom. No wonder Abigail still was able to tend her house and garden, even if not so speedily as in her younger days. Her ancestor had survived ship fever, storm, shipwreck, and starvation. "And I'll live through this hot spell," Abigail promised, "and survive Phyllis' worrying about me, too."

The porcelain of the sink felt slippery in the heat. She let a trickle of water touch her fingers and patted them to her face. "Look at those bags under my eyes!" Wrinkles and loose flesh looked back at her from the bathroom mirror. "I'm old and ugly. And me so pretty men used to stare after me in the street!" She shook her head, mourning for the time when she had been young and nimble, a picture to look at. "Ah, Tom, it's good you can't see me now."

She began the long journey to the kitchen, leaning on the wall to catch her breath. The heat stirred a dizziness in her head. Just old age, she guessed. Lord knew she didn't feel 94 except she couldn't get around too fast. But then, the house and garden didn't care if she moved more slowly than before.

She shuffled to the kitchen counter and opened her money drawer. Liberty half dollars, Mercury dimes, zinc pennies, two-dollar bills, even a few old copper pennies the size of silver dollars filled the drawer to bursting. Crumpled tens and twenties were tossed in among the coins. She found a ten, smoothed it out, and anchored it under the tin of mushrooms that had to be returned. Could be poisoned, the TV had said. Just return them and get your money back. The top of the tin bulged a little. "I'm not opening that tin, no sirree! No point taking a chance on getting sick or worse. Got a lot to do."

Her hair must be brushed up, and breakfast eaten—Jimmy always

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checked, on Phyllis' orders. Breakfast dishes to be cleared away, and her shopping list made out. In this heat it was almost a day's work.

Her hair felt wet when she undid the topknot. Land's sake, it was warm today! Even here in the kitchen, where the sun wouldn't get in until afternoon, the air beat against her face. She fished a sidecomb from the apron hung over the back of the chair. Couldn't let Jimmy catch her with her hair hanging down uncombed like a witch's! Not when she needed his help to survive this, the fourth day of 100-degree heat.

By the time all the wisps were skinned back and hairpinned to the top of her head, her arms ached and her forehead was filmed with sweat. Heat pressed against her eyelids, closing them. She napped in the padded kitchen rocker, her jaw falling, a healthy snore buzzing at the roof of her mouth . . . It was summer and young Tom toddled at her heels while she boiled down kettles of peaches for jam. Clouds of steam rose from the stove and hung in the corners. She mopped her streaming face in her apron. "Sure is hot!" she greeted big Tom as he strode in smelling of the fish he used for lobster bait. Little Tom squealed as his father hoisted him onto his shoulder . . .

Abigail woke with a start, baking in the chair like a clam on an open shell. Her skin felt tight enough to burst. She'd been back in the days before Tom senior grew old and Tom junior went away to war; before the message that reached her shortly after D-Day: "We regret to inform you—"

But missing in action wasn't dead. Tom might even still be alive. Whenever he came home, Abigail would be waiting for him.

"Granma?" Jimmy bounded in, his sun-reddened face streaked with sweat. "You got your grocery list ready?" he panted. "Too hot today to hang around! I gotta get myself under water pretty quick, or I'll melt!" His shirt clung fore and aft in great wet patches. Curls of dark hair clung moistly to his forehead.

"You help yourself to a big glass of lemonade," Abigail said. "And splash yourself under the faucet. Look like a boiled lobster, you do."

Jimmy thrust his shaggy head under the cold water, turning his face to splash all over. "It's 98 already," he told Abigail as he bent his neck to the stream. "Supposed to hit 105. Ma says it's too hot to cook. Will you be all right?"

"I'll have myself some tea and cereal right now," Abigail said. "I've got salad all made up for lunch, and cold chicken for dinner, so I won't need to do any cooking. Heat has to break soon."

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"People are keeling over like flies," Jimmy said. "Mr. Carpenter, he was rushed to the hospital with heat prostration, and Mr. Lyman, he went swimming and took a heart attack. My mother says tell you stay out of the sun and take it real easy."

Abigail dunked a piece of bread in her tea. She filled up quick these days. When she was young, she could eat as good as Tom. He used to laugh at his dainty little wife, eating like a man. But she had worked as hard as he did, growing and canning their fruits and vegetables and making their clothes besides. She was handy with a hammer as well, and painted walls and covered furniture too.

The tea made her sweat. Hadn't been such a hot day in a hundred years. The seat of her dress was damp with perspiration. The kitchen pulsed with trapped heat.

"Don't forget to return the tin of mushrooms," Abigail reminded Jimmy as he scowled over her shopping list. "And I'd like a favor before you go."

Jimmy grinned. "I know. You want me to bring you back a lobster."

"Lobster!" Abigail snorted. "Do you know, when your great-grandsir was your age only poor folks ate lobsters. Used to sneak the shells out of the house at night so neighbors wouldn't see you eating such poor stuff."

Jimmy's eyes skittered away from hers, as always when she mentioned the old days. Abigail, deep in memories, sighed. "You know, Jimmy, I dream to myself about your grand-sir coming home. How would it be, I wonder, if I look up one day and see him standing in the doorway, smiling in that shy way of his—"

"Granma." Jimmy grabbed her hand. "Granma, he's dead. You know that, don't you?"

She looked at him with a faraway expression in her eyes. "His shoulders filled that doorway, Jimmy. I'd give the rest of my life to see him there again."

"Even if he was alive, he'd be old, Granma," Jimmy tried to console her. "Over seventy. But he's not alive. He would have come home."

"Yes." Abigail had to acknowledge that truth. "He would have come home to me." She shook herself out of her reverie. "Jimmy, the favor I want is for you to walk me down to the brook."

Jimmy stared as if she'd gone mad. "I always used to go down to the brook during a hot spell. There's a big sloping rock goes right down into the water. I sit on that and let the water lap over me. You just walk me down there where I can cool off good, and after

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you bring my groceries home, come down and help me back to the house." She picked up a newspaper and fanned herself. "You can feel for yourself how warm it is, and it won't get any cooler."

Jimmy considered. "Okay. But we better not tell Ma. She'll think we've both gone crazy."

Leaning heavily on Jimmy on one side and her walking stick on the other, Abigail crossed at the meadow's edge, grateful for the shade of the bordering woodland. "Once upon a time your great-grandsir raced me across this very meadow," she told Jimmy. "We were just married then." The giddy joy of life buoyed her spirits. "You'd better have yourself a good dunking before you head into town," she suggested to Jimmy, whose face glowed red as fire. "Wedge my walking stick in good between these big rocks so I can let myself in and out of the water while you're gone."

With his help she removed shoes and stockings, lowered herself onto the sloping granite slab, and let the water lap over her. Trees pointed high into the sky overhead, shading the brook from the sun. The torrid air felt pleasantly warm against the chill of the water. Abigail sighed with contentment. "Best way to beat the heat I ever found," she said. "You be careful of the current, now, Jimmy."

Throwing off shirt and sneakers, he splashed about like a young trout, shrieking as the cold water flowed over him. The current had always been too strong for swimming. Jimmy let himself float with it to a rocky outcropping downstream, clambered out, and ran along the bank to plunge in again from Abigail's pink slab. It had been a favorite exercise of young Tom. Abigail smiled, remembering.

Finally Jimmy shook the water off like a seal, his shorts plastered to his lithe young body. "Better get going. Ma told me not to dawdle." His face clouded. "Granma, will you be safe here until I get back?"

His concern tickled her. "I've been through fire and flood, hurricane and fog, sickness, poverty, and Lord knows what-all. What could hurt me way out here?"

Jimmy frowned, his face suddenly showing the harder outlines of the man he would become. "Ma heard on the scanner this morning—that escaped prisoner from Thomaston—the police think he's in this area. Ma said for me to tell you stay indoors and lock up until she can get here tonight to see you."

Abigail laughed. "There's no need to worry. If that crook wants anything, he'll go into town to find it. There's nothing but raccoons and skunks out here. I'll be just fine."

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When Jimmy had gone she dozed, lulled by the cooling murmur of the brook.

In her dreams Tom had come home, still young, his face strong under the soldier's cap. He laughed and swept her up in his arms. Her son, home at last . . .

The sun disappeared behind towering thunderheads before Jimmy returned. The air, hot and still, seemed to tremble with a life of its own. "Thought you were coming right back," Abigail said. Jimmy scuffed at the ground. "Yeah, well, I met some of the kids in town. Ma will cream me if I don't get home soon."

Abigail raised her head. "Smell the air, Jimmy. You can smell the rain coming." Life rose in a strong tide within her. The heat was breaking, and she had survived. Another milestone passed on her journey to 100. Her skirts dried against her legs as she made her way steadily along the meadow's edge to the house. Thunder rumbled a storm warning; underfoot, leaves whirled for cover in the rising of the wind. The first big drops of rain spattered the dry earth as Jimmy helped Abigail up the porch steps.

"Granma, do you mind if I don't go in with you? Your things are on the table. I gotta get home."

"'Course I don't mind." The house looked drowsy under the gathering clouds. "You run along."

Abigail watched as Jimmy sprinted off. Once she too had been able to run like that, she thought, as she entered the house alone. Although the sun had gone, the light outside made the kitchen seem dark. At first only the white cabinets and the glint of the mushroom can stood out. Just like a boy—he forgot to return the mushrooms. Why, if my memory failed me like that, Phyllis would say I'd gone senile.

Then she saw the man. He stood beside her open money drawer. He was as dark-haired as her son Tom had been, lean-limbed, hard-faced. His left hand retreated empty from the money drawer. In his right he held a gun.

Abigail's heart pounded. She peered through the gloom of the kitchen straight at the gunman. The smell of death surrounded him. If he panicked and shot— She hadn't survived this heat to fall to a bullet. But what could she do? Scream? Faint? If only Tom was here!

Take away any need for him to shoot, that was the thing. Make him feel safe. If it had been Tom—for one heart-stopping moment she'd almost thought it was.

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With the thought of Tom, she knew what to do. A big smile creased her face.

"Tom!" She dropped her walking stick and held out her arms, love in her voice. "My Tom, my boy! You've come home at last!" Summoning all her courage she kept smiling as if the gun wasn't there.

He stiffened, his eyes wary. What would I say if it really was Tom? she asked herself. "I've dreamed of this hour for years," she crooned. "Ever since the telegram came saying you were missing in action. Tom, oh, Tom, let me look at you!"

His eyes studied her. Such cold small eyes! Better not to look at them. What else could she do to forestall him? He'd need money, a way to get out undetected, perhaps some food. Could she convince him she was no threat to him?

"Did you see how full the money drawer is?" Abigail said. "And every cent is yours, Tom. Do you remember when I began saving pennies in it for you? I've never stopped saving all the time you've been gone." She beamed on him. "Take it, help yourself. It's your welcome-home present."

The rain fell in earnest. Thunder prowled the roof. She must keep calm, and keep this invader calm despite the tension added by the storm. Thank God Jimmy had gone! Better not think of Jimmy. She might say his name and give herself away.

Lightning flared, lighting the room like a stage set. The paper bags of groceries Jimmy had brought had been torn apart. She noted the empty banana peel, the can of tuna half opened.

"Wouldn't you like a bite to eat?" Abigail fluttered like a doting mother. "I've a salad all made and cold roast chicken. Sit down there, Tom, at the head of the table, while I fetch out the rolls and butter. This is your house, and everything in it is yours."

Was she making it plain enough that she was alone, and harmless? Did he believe she was a daft old woman, grown senile in her loneliness? Trembling, she turned her back on him to bring food to the table, half expecting to feel a bullet between her shoulder blades. She brought silverware and a plate for him and heaped it with chicken. His eyes watched warily as she set out the salad.

With her heart pounding so hard she thought she'd suffocate, she picked up the tin of mushrooms. "You always did love mushrooms, Tom," she cooed. Her hands shook as she dumped them into the salad. She hoped the shaking would pass as the tremor of old age. "Eat up now, while I get the chocolate cake. You always did favor chocolate."

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She set a pitcher of lemonade down beside the food and gestured toward the table for him to eat. He stood, weighing her. Those cold small eyes had no sign of humanity in them. She kept the foolish smile on her face. Long minutes crept by while the thunder crashed and rain fell in heavy sheets. Had he too heard the TV bulletin about the bad mushrooms? If he had, he would kill her, or worse, injure her for the rest of her life.

"Sit down, Tom, and we'll have a bite together." Abigail helped herself to some lemonade and buttered a roll and sank into her rocker. Her eating seemed to reassure him. He grabbed the pitcherful of lemonade and almost drained it. Then he fell into a chair, the gun still in one hand while he shoveled food into himself with the other, consuming chicken, rolls, and cake in wolf-sized mouthfuls. And salad. He ate a good deal of the salad.

Now to find a way for him to leave. Oh, for the fleet legs of her youth! She would have been off like the wind, and even his bullets wouldn't catch her. But as she couldn't go, he must.

The rain, windborne, slapped at the windows. She had an inspiration. "Tom, my love, the rain will be coming in on the other side of the house. Would you close the windows for me, like a good boy? It's so hard for me to get around."

She let her head nod as if she was drifting into sleep, yawned, and faked a snore. He rose from the table. She felt him standing over her. Then there was a wild scrabbling at her money drawer. She snored on. Finally the sound she longed for—retreating footsteps, the door slamming. She sat in the rocker. He might come back to check on her. She sat for a long while. And then, incredibly, she found herself dozing . . .

It was evening, the sky a clear blue, the air cool and dry. The house felt empty. Abigail considered. Should she report to the police? It would cause talk, Phyllis would be all upset, and a nursing home loomed as the immediate consequence of Phyllis' fear. And the gunman wasn't going to be a menace to anybody else. At best those mushrooms would slow him down enough for the police to catch him. At worst the mushrooms would kill him.

"We'll keep our little secret, Tom, you and I," she decided. "Land's sake, Phyllis will be here and the table cluttered with dishes. I'd best get to cleaning up."

She hummed as she tidied. "Another day done, Tom," she mused. "Another day closer to reaching a hundred."

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a Detective Petrella story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

From a reader's report on this story: "full of heart . . . fascinating police procedure . . . publishing this story is a public service because it shows the side of law and order so attractively . . ." A rousing adventure of Detective Petrella when he was on his way up the ladder, when he was still Constable Patrick Petrella . . .

SOURCE SEVEN

by MICHAEL GILBERT

How curious, and how different, are the threads that form the pattern. A drunken crane driver at Tilbury Docks; a pink-cheeked young man fishing off the south bank of the Gironde; a middle-aged gourmet with a house of rose-colored brick and ashlar stone in the hills above Maidenhead.

On a fine morning in September, Superintendent Costorphine was studying the entries in his ledger, under the cross-reference of diacetylmorphine, which is better known as heroin, a product of morphia, which is itself a by-product of opium. The book lay open at a page headed with the numeral 7.

Scotland Yard has no separate Narcotics Bureau. Nevertheless, there are men in the Central Office, and Costorphine was one of them, who had come, by accident or design, to specialize in the ramifications of the drug traffic. They are coordinators. They work hand in glove with departments whose special interests are Undesirable Aliens, Unlawful Night Clubs, Prostitution, Procuration, and Assault with Violence; occasional flowerings of the same shoot.

Superintendent Costorphine was tall, white, and untidy—"like a wax candle in a draft," said Superintendent Hazlerigg, who admired, but could not love him. He had the mind of a chessmaster and the

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patience of Job. Which was as well, because he was fighting a battle in which victory was impossible and the most that could be looked for was a measure of success.

He was speaking to Hazlerigg of this. "The real trouble," he said, "is that the stuff is no longer manufactured in England. It was tried, in the twenties. Morphia, heroin, and cocaine. When we put Kid Manning inside, they packed it up. It's all made in the Middle East now."

"I expect the authorities are more broad-minded there," agreed Hazlerigg. "Why do you class that as a trouble? I should have thought it was a good thing."

"No," said Costorphine. "If you can hit the producer you can stop his line once and for all. Now that we can't touch the producer we have to spread our efforts and go for the carriers. A lot of them are little men—stewards and deckhands and lascars. They're a plague, but they never carry more than tiny quantities. It's the big, regular, well-organized sources that matter."

He looked down at the ledger in front of him. It was called Costorphine's Source Book—or, by the young and irreverent members of the department, Mother Costorphine's Cookery Book. In it, numbered serially, could be found set out all the known details of ways and means in which supplies of unlawful narcotics were entering—or were thought to be entering—the country.

About some of these sources everything was known, and in these cases a neat red line drawn at the foot of the page indicated one more chapter closed and one more hole stopped. About other sources, information varied from the moderately complete to the extremely sketchy.

Page seven was practically blank.

"By the way," said Hazlerigg, his mind reverting to the reason that had brought him in to Costorphine's room. "We've found a lot of that jewelry."

They had been discussing a lady of title, in whom they shared an interest. She had disappeared from her family home three months before, with some of her own and some of her family's jewelry, and had just been picked out of the gutter in Dean Street.

"She's been selling it and pawning it," he went on. "She didn't get much for it but the transactions were honest as far as they went. I expect the family will buy it back. She'd no money on her at all. I don't think there's much doubt how she spent it, poor girl."

"No," said Costorphine. He himself never said things like "poor

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girl" or "poor man" about victims of drugs; any more than he said "poor fellow" when he had captured an unwary opponent's Queen. "What was the cause of death?"

"Exposure and weakness."

Costorphine pinched his long upper lip. "There's no doubt in my mind," he said, "that the heroin in her handbag came through Source Seven."

"It's a marvel to me how you keep 'em apart," said Hazlerigg. He got up and peered down at the traffic in Whitehall.

"Changes in manufacturing methods, chiefly. This stuff was made almost exactly two and a half years ago. It started to appear on the English market last month. That's always been the peculiarity of Source Seven. A time lag of twenty-seven to thirty months between manufacture and disposal. It's very odd, that. Usually they're only too keen to get it on the market, you know, and pick up their profit."

"Is Seven a big source?"

"Big enough to be worth stopping," said Costorphine. He was not given to overstatements. "By the way," he added, "did you hear that we had found Thomas?"

"Thomas who?"

"Tiny Thomas."

"Oh, him," said Hazlerigg. "When you say 'found,' I suppose you mean—"

"Yes. Quite dead. He'd been strangled."

This is where the drunken crane driver comes in. His name was Rickett and he had been celebrating the return home of his eldest son from Cyprus; celebrating with such serious concentration that when he came on duty next morning he was not only still drunk, but too drunk to realize it. With the result that he had succeeded in dropping a steel girder weighing five tons from a height of sixty feet. Fortunately, no one was underneath it at the time, but the loading jetty had disintegrated as if a bomb had hit it.

Two days later a diver had gone down to assess the damage. While down there, he had observed what looked like a roll of cable wire. The scour was carrying it slowly along the river bed toward him. Fearing that it might run foul of him, he had stooped to push it to one side and had noticed two feet projecting from one end.

But for this chance the little fish and the crabs would have had time to finish what they had begun, and in the end there would have been nothing left but a cocoon of rusty wire, rolling backward and forward as the tide ebbed and ran.

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As it was, the police were able, with some difficulty, to reconstruct and identify the remains of Tiny Thomas, who was a vendor of newspapers and, in addition, a most useful and successful police informer.

There the matter might have rested, but for the fact that when the experts examined Thomas' coat they took particular care to look for a secret pocket which they knew it contained. In it they found a sodden piece of cardboard which, under the influence of oblique photography, yielded the single word: POYAK.

Since Thomas was known to have been working for some time on Source Seven—to which he said he had some sort of lead—the matter was referred to Superintendent Costorphine.

"What does it mean?" asked Hazlerigg, when all this had been explained to him. "It sounds like the name of a racehorse."

"No one knows what it means," said Costorphine. "It's evidently a name that Thomas heard—or more likely misheard—and since he thought it important he wrote it down and cached it in his inner pocket."

"Po-yak," said Hazlerigg. And then, "Poy-ak." It sounded equally silly either way.

"My first idea was that it might be the name of a boat—perhaps some small motor craft—or a bungalow on the sea or river. Any of those would have made sense against a smuggling background."

"Have you got anyone in particular on it?"

"I haven't been able to spare anyone at the moment," said Costorphine. "Why?"

"I was talking last night to Haxtell. He's got a Detective Petrella in one of the Divisions. An unusual background. Talks Arabic, among other things. A lot of these drug carriers are lascars from the docks, aren't they? Might be useful."

"Hmph," said Costorphine ungratefully.

"Give the boy a run," said Hazlerigg. "It'll be a nice change from picking up drunks on Highside. I won't let him do anything drastic without asking you or me."

Detective Constable Patrick Petrella was something of a joke at headquarters. Hazlerigg had borrowed him off the beat when he had discovered that he spoke Arabic, and had used him as interpreter in a piece of business which he was engaged on at the Docks. He had discovered, with surprise, that his youthful-looking assistant had other accomplishments. Besides Arabic, he spoke French and

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a little Spanish. He had been brought up in Cairo where he had been apprenticed to a firm of safe- and lockmakers. He was clever with his hands. He could play the guitar and knew something of subjects as far apart as wireless telegraphy and wine-making.

Petrella had spent an enjoyable two months at Central Office where he had come under a certain amount of fire from the old hands. He had accepted the leg-pulling with the same equanimity as he accepted everything else.

"Do some *thinking* first," said Hazlerigg to this young man. "If you strike a line, hunt it yourself and report results. There's a Thames Conservancy List of motorboats and motor cruisers which you might start on. If you get hold of anything, tell Superintendent Costorphine or myself before you do anything silly."

Petrella saluted gravely and withdrew.

He was back the next morning. "Could you find out, sir," he said, "whether Source Seven could have anything to do with France?"

Hazlerigg telephoned Costorphine. When he had done, he said, "Yes. The stuff starts in the Levant, but there are some indications that there is an intermediate stage in France. Why?"

"Po-yak," said Petrella. "It's what an Englishman might make of Pauillac, if he overheard it."

"Yes," said Hazlerigg. "So he might. Is Po-whatever-its-name-is on the coast?"

"In a way, sir. It's on the south bank of the Gironde—that is, the mouth of the Garonne. Quite large boats go past it, I believe, on their way up to Bordeaux. I don't think they stop there. It's not a large place. Perhaps if I could go and have a look round—"

The thought of sending a very junior detective constable direct to Bordeaux had not even entered Hazlerigg's head. He opened his mouth to say, "Certainly not," then closed it again.

"I'll speak to Superintendent Costorphine," he said at last. "Meanwhile, go on checking those motorboats."

Surprisingly, Costorphine supported the idea.

"Normally," he agreed, "we should ask the French Police to cooperate. But what exactly are we going to ask them to do? Go to Pauillac and look for—what? If there's anything actually sticking out they'd have noticed it before."

"They're usually very helpful," agreed Hazlerigg.

"Of course. They're very cooperative. But unless we can give them rather more to go on, I'm afraid it'll be a routine inquiry and a nil return."

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"All right," said Hazlerigg. "Let's let him go, then."

And to Petrella he said, "Look here, son. You're going as a tourist. You've got a fortnight to produce some return for the public money that's being spent on you. I'll give you an introduction to the Commissaire at Bordeaux, but don't use it unless you have to. Behave like a tourist—have you got any hobbies?"

"I used to fish quite a bit."

"Excellent. Take a fishing rod. It'll be a boring existence but I expect you'll survive. And just what are you looking so pleased about?"

"Some of the finest claret in the world, sir, comes from Pauillac."

"Well, you won't be able to buy much of that on your allowance," said Hazlerigg. "Keep your eye on the fish."

Which brings us to a young man fishing on the Garonne.

Patrick Petrella never before remembered such a feeling of entire and absolute contentment. He was seated in a clump of reeds. It was not a very good place for fishing, but it was an excellent place for observation. Already he was in love with the misty grays and greens of the Médoc and the broad silver-gray river which ran past his feet.

Away across the river, on the extreme right of his view, were the church and citadel of Blaye. In front of him spread the willow-covered flats of the Ile Saint-Louis, with its cheerful-looking lighthouse, like a single-funneled liner. On his left lay Pauillac jetty.

The warm sun was tempered by a breeze which rippled the water. The tide was on the ebb and a single battered tramp steamer was coming up against it.

Petrella settled himself more comfortably on his old mackintosh and fell into a trance which was part happiness, part the feel of the sun on his back, and part genuine tiredness. It was during the evenings that he did his work, and he had not seen his bed until the very small hours of that morning.

"Garçon très sympathique," declared Madame Jolliot of the Pension Maritime. "One can observe from his accent that he is not a Frenchman. A Belgian, perhaps."

"His passport is British," said Monsieur Jolliot.

"There are all sorts of foreigners in Britain," said Madame. "It proves nothing. To my way of thinking he is not British. A Pole, perhaps. He is not reserved."

He was certainly not reserved. He took his evening drink at one or more of the four main riverside cafés. He joined in all public

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arguments. If there was a party he could usually be relied on to make one of it. He was young, and free with his money, and as soon as the ice had been broken there had been no lack of parties.

It was, perhaps, a fortunate moment, being the last few days before the vintage. Soon everyone would be too tired at the end of the day to do more than eat and tumble into bed. At the moment there was an interval of leisure. The last row had been weeded, the gear overhauled, the casks scrubbed. So there was time for parties.

It was a social routine that left Petrella a little fatigued, but all was compensated for by the long dreamlike mornings beside the river.

The tramp steamer was abreast of him now. It was alone on the wide reach. Boats usually came in with the flood, instead of battling up against the ebb. She must, he reflected, be running to a schedule that brooked no delay.

A man appeared on the lower well deck. Petrella saw a dark face above white overalls. The man was some sort of galley hand. He was dumping a scuttle of rubbish, which he emptied over the side of the boat, downwind. Refuse, boxes, paper, tins flew out. A bag burst as it hit the water and Petrella saw potato peelings. He grinned. You couldn't litter up the sea the same way as you could the land. There were too many scavengers about. Seagulls were already wheeling over the trove.

Soon only one large cardboard carton was visible. It floated high in the water, with a sort of lopsided dignity, and the wind was driving it across the current. Petrella wondered if it would sink before it hit the reeds.

At that moment he became aware that there were other parties interested. Out of a creek, a hundred yards downstream, came a dinghy. There were two boys in it. They handled the boat skillfully, pulling into the current and judging their distance. Another type of scavenger, thought Petrella. Seagulls and boys. He didn't think they would get much for their pains. The way the box floated, he imagined it was empty.

The boat was alongside now. The two boys shipped oars and leaned over. The boat dipped as the box came over the side.

Petrella started to wind in his line. His mind was no longer on fishing. He was trying to work out how a light-looking cardboard carton, which floated high out of the water, could need two strong boys to handle it; and how it could cause a boat to dip when taken aboard; unless it was much heavier than it looked; in which case

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why had it not sunk? Unless, of course, it had been scientifically buoyed—say, with cork, or compressed air.

He packed up his fishing gear, folded his mackintosh over his arm, and walked back down the river path. When he came to the head of the creek he saw that the dinghy was already back at its moorings, and empty. The boys were lashing a tarpaulin over a small handcart. He could see that there were nets on the cart. Since there was no sign of the carton he felt safe in assuming that it was under the nets.

The boys glanced up as he passed. Both of them were brown-faced and black-haired, and they looked like wide-awake citizens. Petrella threw them a good-day to which the older boy replied with the conventional "Monsieur." Petrella passed on. He had no intention of following them. Such a course would have been worse than stupid. It was, moreover, quite unnecessary.

After luncheon he fell into conversation with Monsieur Jolliot. There has never been any real need for a system of land registration in France. Every inhabitant of the commune knows to whom every inch of land belongs. The fields and vineyards with their infinite divisions and subdivisions are spread out for all to see, like a living family tree, a record of marriage, birth, patrimony, and descent.

The creek and the landing stage belonged to the owner of Château Maurice-Epinard. It was an interesting example, said Monsieur Jolliot, of acquisition through the female line, the male line being extinct. The Château itself stood some three kilometers away. No, it had not a classified "crû," but produced a very good patrician wine, of the second class. Two boys? Undoubtedly they would be the sons of Clairambaud, the facteur, who acted also as *maître de chai*, or cellar master. In a big Château like Latour or Mouton-Rothschild the offices would be distinct, but not in a small one. Both boys were well known.

"Full of *espièglerie*," said Madame Jolliot.

"Full of impertinence," amended Monsieur Jolliot. "Out at all seasons in their little boat. Some day they will come to no good."

Petrella agreed with him and retired to his room for an afternoon nap. What he had to do next needed careful thought.

He got up at half-past four, had a cup of chocolate, and then strolled out toward the Château. After a short walk he left the main road and followed a broad track, between rows of vines. When he reached his destination he saw that "Château" was a courtesy title. It was a large flat house, overshadowed by trees, with a stuccoed

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front and sham turrets. The long windows were shuttered, and there was no smoke coming from the chimneys.

The cellerage buildings formed a large separate block, with its own entrance and forecourt. There was some life here. Two men were lounging in the front of the court and a woman, standing in a kitchen doorway, was talking to a third man, a bulky red-faced person, with the look more of a Gascon than a Bordelaise.

Petrella guessed that he would be the *maître de chai*, and went up to him. He knew that it was not uncommon for visitors to come to a château at vintage time. At the larger châteaux there would be a stream of them. They were perhaps less common at a small, isolated place like Maurice-Epinard.

"Monsieur Clairambaud?"

"The same," said the red-faced man.

"I wondered if—"

"You wish to see our cellars. Certainly. This way, if you please."

They passed up the courtyard. "You have walked out from Pauillac? You are staying there perhaps?"

"Yes."

"From England?"

Petrella agreed that he was from England. They had reached the door leading down into the cellar. Clairambaud held it open. As Petrella turned to go in he noticed, pressed to a nearby window, the face of a boy. The expression was an unpleasant mixture of malice and anticipation. The woman had gone inside and the other two men had closed up silently behind him.

He realized that he had not been quite as careful as he imagined.

"Go ahead," said Clairambaud. His face was still smiling but Petrella saw, for the first time, his great butcher's hands. He walked down the steps.

"Straight ahead." It was an order. The three men followed him closely. They were walking down an aisle, dimly lit, between rows of barrels. At the far end there was a grating. Clairambaud pushed past him, took out a key, and opened the door.

"Our inner cellar," he said, "where we keep some of our most precious vintages. It is useful for a multitude of other purposes. Please go in."

"I suppose you know what you are doing," said Petrella.

"Of a certainty," said the man calmly.

"My friends at the hotel will be inquiring after me when I do not return. I informed them, of course, where I was going."

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"I think that is a lie," said Clairambaud. "My son tells me that you spoke to no one before leaving. In any event, when you do not return, they will think, no doubt, that you are at some party busy asking questions. That seems to have been your occupation on all other evenings. To ask questions."

Petrella had nothing to say to that.

"By tomorrow morning, no doubt, some inquiry will start. Believe me, my little detective, they will have to search long and closely if they wish to find you then."

The two men standing behind Monsieur Clairambaud laughed.

"One other thing. If you shout and scream it may be necessary to tie you up with cords. That will be very uncomfortable for you. And you will, in any event, have wasted your time. At this point you are three meters below the ground and the walls are of great thickness."

"I shall not shout," said Petrella.

"I was sure of it," said Clairambaud. He walked out, snapped shut the lock of the grille with his big key, and turned out the light. Then he turned it on again for a moment to say, "Look out for the spiders. They grow, in this darkness, to the size of a man's hand."

Then he turned it out again. The three men tramped away. When they reached the steps the cellar light went out as well, and Petrella heard the heavy outer door being shut and bolted.

He sat for quite a long time. It was not that he was afraid of the spiders, whose existence he doubted, but he decided to wait until his breathing was normal and the first little flickerings of panic had died down. Then he could start to work things out.

Slowly the darkness cleared to a dim, shadowy dusk. There was no direct source of light in his cage, but he realized that the huge cellar outside was not quite black. There must be ventilators, up near the roof, to let in the necessary air, and they let in some light as well. He could see the bars of his door black against the lesser darkness beyond. The atmosphere was quite fresh.

What a fool he had been. He had imagined he was being clever. He had only succeeded in being obvious. They had suspected him all along. They had not even minded—that was the galling part—they had not even minded him seeing how the goods came ashore from the steamer. They had known only too well that he would come to the Château. Everything was arranged. He had no doubt at all that a bundle would go back on the handcart that night, and that in the early hours of the morning a heavily loaded dinghy would pull out from the jetty into midstream.

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That, or something like it, was their intention. One thing mattered. Would they visit him again before night? Even if they intended to kill him that night they would hardly dare to move him before midnight. More probably it would be later than that. Would they visit him first? In the circumstances, they would be unlikely to waste food and drink on him.

All the same, he thought they would look in once—just to make sure that all was well. Perhaps at about nine or ten o'clock. That gave him three hours to make his preparations.

He was confident that he could open the door. It would take time, but it could be done. The lack of light did not bother him, because you always have to open a lock by touch and not by sight. He would need two strong, thinnish pieces of iron, bent to the correct angle.

In a clumsy great lock like this one, the retaining spring would be very powerful. The sort of spring that needed a thick key with a long shaft and a wide handle to lift it at all. Little pieces of bent wire were going to be no use. You would need good steel. In his hip pocket he had a relic of his service with the Egyptian company, a pair of pliers with a fine saw-edge in one handle and a triangular file in the other. There was plenty of metal in the wire racks around him. He selected a cross-strut of half-inch angle-iron, out of sight of the door, and started to work on it.

It took him two hours to make the necessary tools. When he had perfected them, and knew that he could open the door quickly, he hid them in the dust at the foot of the cellar wall. Then he waited.

The waiting was the hard part. He might be making a stupid mistake by waiting at all. Equally, he could spoil everything by starting too early. He decided to compromise. He would give them until eleven o'clock.

It was ten to eleven when they came again—the same three men. This time they searched him. They found the pliers, but made no comment on them. Petrella got the idea they were emptying his pockets less to deprive him of chances of escape than as a first step in stripping all marks of identity from him. His tailor's tabs would go next. Then perhaps his fingers and his face.

One man had brought a can of coffee. "You had better drink it," said Clairambaud.

"Later," said Petrella.

"As you wish."

When they had gone he sniffed at the contents of the can and

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decided that there was more in it than coffee. He emptied it into the corner.

At eleven fifteen he opened the grating and stepped out into the cellar.

The door at the head of the steps offered him nothing. It was massive and was bolted on the outside.

There was an inner door, at the top of a ramp, in the left-hand wall, and this was unlocked. It led into the *chambre des cuviers*, where the fermenting vats stood, filling the entire space from floor to ceiling. They were empty now, scrubbed and ready for the coming vintage, but the room stank of bygone grape harvests. Unfortunately, its outer door was bolted too.

He made another circuit of the two cellars and confirmed that there were only two ways out. Then he sat down again to think.

He might hide in the cellar. But for how long? Or he might conceal himself behind the door and try to slip out, or fight his way out, when the men came for him. It seemed a slender chance.

And at the back of his mind, eluding him, was the vague impression that he once knew of a way out. It took him fifteen minutes to think of it, and then it was a chance thought about scrubbing the vats that brought it back to him.

In olden days they had to be scrubbed by men with brushes who were lowered through the opening at the top. In modern vats, however, there was often a device in the back at ground level, enabling a man to get through. He would drag a pressure hose with him and so the work would be done in one-tenth of the time. Petrella prayed that the march of science had reached the Château Maurice-Epinard.

It had; and a minute later he was inside the vat itself. He had armed himself with a pole from the cellar, and with it he pushed at the big trapdoor in the ceiling of the vat. It swung up under his pressure. So far, so good. The chance existed, but at the moment it was three clear feet out of reach of his fingertips. He needed something to stand on.

The empty barrels in the main cellar would be tall enough set on end, but even if he could move them, they were too wide to get into the vat. He stumbled round in the dark for ten minutes and discovered two brooms and a rake, but nothing more.

Twelve o'clock.

Finally, sweating now, he went back into his prison and extracted the bottles from one of the racks. Then he set to work at loosening a section. It was a very bad time indeed before it came away from

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the wall. But it was thin enough to be squeezed through the opening in the vat and just strong enough to take his weight.

The last stage was a nightmare. He dared place very little weight on the rack, and he had to stand on it and lift a heavy trapdoor, using a thin wooden pole. That done, he had to pull himself up through the opening. His arms were trembling with fatigue, and twice he thought he would drop. It was only the realization that if he failed he would never be able to try again that got him through onto the floor of the loft.

That was almost the end of his difficulties. The loft door was bolted, but on the inside. Five minutes later he was in the open, creeping between the vines, heading for the main road.

It was seven in the morning, in London. Superintendent Costorphine had been dragged from his bed at six, but he seemed neither surprised nor excited. He listened silently to the outline of Detective Petrella's adventures.

"How did you get back, then?" he said.

"I got a lift in a lorry to Bordeaux," said the battered young man. "I got in touch with Commissaire Michel and he took me to the airport. We were lucky. The plane from Marrakech had to touch down and he got me a seat in her. Did you get my telephone message?"

"I got nothing."

"There's a forest fire south of Paris. A lot of the lines are down."

"I expect that's it," said the Superintendent. He pondered for a moment. "Let me have your ideas about it," he said. "What do you think these people do with the stuff—after they've picked it up out of the water?"

"I found out," said Petrella, "that a lot of the vineyards—particularly the smaller ones that don't go in for château-bottled wines—will sell you a barrel or more at a time. They arrange the shipping and the customs clearance. You just pay the money, and in due course the barrel or barrels are delivered."

"I see," said the Superintendent. "Your idea is that they hide the stuff in the wine and export a barrel or two to a contact on this side."

"Yes, sir. If they used a plastic container—or something of the sort—they could regulate the weight so that it wouldn't either float or sink. It would be suspended, so to speak. It would be almost impossible to detect without actually draining the cask."

"You would appear to have a natural talent for smuggling. Per-

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haps you can tell me why the man who receives it leaves it alone for two years. Just plain caution, would you think?"

"Oh no, sir," said Petrella earnestly. "Once a claret is in cask you must *never* touch it for two years. You'd do endless harm to the fermentation. After two years you draw it off and bottle it. That would be the time to get the stuff out, without hurting either it or the claret. In 1952 you get a 1950 heroin."

"Hmph," said the Superintendent. "We're in the realm of guesswork there. The first thing to do is to ask the customs people to give us a list of private buyers from this particular Château. It can't be a very long list. You'd better go to bed."

"You wouldn't like me to—"

"No, no," said the Superintendent testily,"I can handle it now."

Which brings us to a lovely house of rose-colored brick and ashlar stone in the hills above Maidenhead; and a portly man with a white face and red lips, who started by protesting, then screamed with rage, and ended by whimpering. He cried some more when he heard what the Judge had to say to him.

And a written commendation from the Chief Officer of Police for Detective-Constable Petrella.

And one more neat red line in Superintendent Costorphine's book.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

A STICKY WICKET

by S. L. VARNADO

They hanged a young man until dead
For striking his wife in the head.
"During a game of croquet
One oughtn't to play
With mallets aforethought," they said.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 580th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . a glimpse of Western nostalgia . . .

The author, Phyllis Benson, is 34, married, and works primarily as an artist, in partnership with her husband, "handcrafting small metal people from horseshoe nails." She is now also working on the transition from artist to writer and has several novels currently making the rounds of publishing houses . . .

ON THE UPGRADE CURVE

by PHYLLIS BENSON

"Barry?"

"What?"

"You work for Pinkerton?"

"Nope."

"Who do you work for?"

"The railroad. You know that," said Barry. "Why'd you ask, Tom?"

"Just curious," the other man answered. He studied the cards in his hand another minute. "I guess you beat me."

Barry gathered up the cards to deal again, undaunted by the sway of the train under his feet. He felt the cars roll into the first curve and looked up a moment, his eyes blank of emotion in the confines of the railroad car.

Noticing the movement, Tom asked, "You hear anything?"

"Nope," said Barry. "You expecting something?"

"I guess not," said his companion. "I was just wondering why they put us next to last on the train. Payroll usually rides further up."

"Beats me," shrugged Barry. He dealt the cards slowly, spreading the minutes out.

"What if they hit us?" asked Tom nervously.

"Who?" asked Barry.

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"You know," Tom replied. "Kelly's gang. The ones that hit the train last month. They killed Hansen."

Barry grunted noncommittally, saying, "He should of give them the strongbox."

"Would you?" asked Tom. "Wouldn't you put up a fight like he did?"

"Not for someone else's money," said Barry. "Maybe for my own."

"I thought you were a friend of Hansen's," said Tom, his voice toned in accusation. "Aren't you sorry he's dead?"

"Sure I'm sorry," said Barry. "That don't bring him back. We got our orders."

"You wouldn't put up a fight?" persisted Tom, ignoring the cards in his hands.

"Maybe," said Barry. "Only up to a point. If you can hold out, it's one thing. If you can't hold out, don't be a fool about it. If you or I was a gunslinger, or even one of them Pinkertons, it might work. But we're not. I figure I don't get paid enough to die over a payroll. The company wants someone to die defending a couple of boxes, then they can hire someone for dying. Me, I plan to live for the next run."

Tom argued, "They can't send out an army with every one of these trains. No one knows when a holdup gang will strike."

"That's right," said Barry. "You never know. So don't worry about it."

"I wish we had a safe for these shipments," sighed Tom. "They'd sure find it harder to haul off a safe than a couple of bags or boxes."

"Could be," said Barry. He turned back to the cards. "Quit fidgeting. What you got?"

Tom looked at his hand and folded it up. He said, "Nothing. I'd rather talk about the robbery last month."

Barry glared at him irritably and gathered the cards again. He dealt solitaire in front of him on the board. He figured they were almost halfway through the curves. The train was slowing down, losing ground against the grade. In a few more minutes it would slow to a crawl, inching the last few hundred yards to the summit.

"What about it?" groused Barry.

"You hear the rumors that someone is on the inside, tipping the train robbers as to which shipments to hit?" asked Tom. He wiped his face with the big handkerchief and draped it around his neck.

"I heard," grumbled Barry. He laid the nine on the ten and steadied the board with his knee as the car jerked back.

"Who do you think it is?" asked Tom.

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"Hard telling," muttered Barry. He frowned at the cards and hesitated between the two eights visible.

Tom stood up anxiously, his eyes roving over the boxes and bags stacked in the car. He watched as Barry made his selection and turned over the next card.

"Aren't you worried?" asked Tom. He was uneasy at Barry's cool assurance. "After Hansen getting killed, I don't mind admitting I'm edgy this trip."

"What's to worry about?" asked Barry. "Either they hit us or they don't. If they do, it'll be in the next few minutes before the train hits the downgrade—it's too hard to stop the train after the summit. If they don't hit us, you worried for nothing."

"But what if they do?" persisted Tom. "What do we do?"

"We hand over the box," said Barry. "Kelly's too quick on the trigger. I hear he's impatient, so the first thing we do is give him the money. That's my orders from the railroad. And I plan to stick to them. I put that box on, I locked it in place, and I'll unlock it and hand it over if I have to."

"Isn't it our duty to do something?" asked Tom.

"Like what?" came the response. Barry turned the cards over in his hands, picking out the ones he needed to fill out the game.

Tom watched him flip the cards, finally blurting out, "That's cheating! You can't play cards that way."

Barry looked up. A faint trace of a smile mocked Tom. Barry said, "The game's over. I'm just passing time."

The train buckled, wheels squealing to a stop. Tom held his breath. Barry slowly shuffled the cards. The men waited, each in his own way, until they heard the pounding on the door.

"Didn't take them long to find the payroll car," muttered Barry across the dusty space.

"Open up!" bellowed a voice. Barry stood up casually, not flinching when the shotgun blast cut through the door.

"I'm coming," shouted Barry. "Hold on a minute!"

The two men in the railroad car looked over at the short shotgun tucked behind two bags. Barry whistled tunelessly to himself as he shoved the gun out of sight. Then he walked to the door, unlatched it, and slid it open.

"You know what we want," yelled the man standing at the door. He leveled the shotgun at Barry.

"Yep," said the trainman. "It'll take a minute. It's chained down."

"Hurry up," a raspy voice cut in. Barry nodded at the tall thin

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man on the lathered bay. The trainman guessed that was the leader, Kelly, who was fingering a new rifle so eagerly.

"Be right back," said Barry. He turned into the car, ignoring the man with the shotgun who hopped in behind him. Barry leaned over the box chained to one side of the car. He unlocked the padlock and said, "I'll help you hand this out. You be careful. We got some gold dust in here. You go dropping the box and you'll split the sack. Then you'll have to sift the gold from that sand out there."

"We'll take care of it," snapped the train robber.

Barry noticed that Tom stood away from the door, avoiding the thief's gaze. Barry waited while the robber dropped to the ground, then he handed down the box. The trainman stood straight for a moment, gazing at the train standing on the curve ahead of him. It was good they were stopped here. It was level enough so that the train could start again without much trouble.

"You got the key to this?" shouted Kelly.

"Right here," said Barry. He tossed a key to the horseman, who handed it to the man near the box. The man unlocked the box, flashing a double handful of money.

"Okay," nodded Kelly in approval. "Let it go."

At a signal to the lookout, the train jerked forward. It strained against the upgrade.

Barry watched as three men ran to join those at the money box. They had been holding the engineer under guard.

"Shut that door!" hollered Kelly menacingly.

Barry slammed the door shut, latching it again. He walked to the concealed shotgun and drew it from the hiding place.

"You're not going to shoot them!" protested Tom. "They'd kill us! You said you wouldn't fight!"

Barry winked at his companion. "No, I'm not going to shoot."

"I didn't see any gold," said Tom, abruptly wary. "And you were too eager to hand over the box and key. You sure you don't know anyone who might tip them off to payroll trains? Like maybe yourself?"

"Positive," said Barry. His face broke into a smile. "You didn't see the gold because it's in a different box."

The two men rode in silence until a few minutes later when the air was broken by a muffled blast. Tom turned pale. He said, "What was that?"

"Well, I'd say that was dynamite," offered Barry. "I'd say maybe I gave them the wrong box. Maybe I gave them a box with some of

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that decaying dynamite we found in the work shed a few weeks back."

Realization broke slowly over the other man. Tom looked sick. He leaned against the side of the car, breathing shallowly as he thought of the blast in the middle of the men huddled over the strongbox. He shook his head weakly, not looking at Barry.

Barry sat down again, the shotgun pointed offhand at Tom. He said, "It would be hard to prove an inside job. Unless you happened to see a man make a mark on a railroad car. And if he was a telegraph operator that sometimes spelled the men at the office. He might be able to do it. You know, Tom, I think you should of gone back to the office if train robberies don't set well. You should of stayed on the key."

Tom slid down the side of the car, closing his eyes.

"Yep," continued Barry. "Kelly always was in a hurry. I happen to know he's your brother-in-law, and always was an impatient man. I recall he'd bust something open before he'd take the time to figure it out. Old dynamite's touchy that way. It's no place for an excitable man."

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DEPARTMENT OF SECOND STORIES

Richard Grant's first story, "Mr. Pike's Hobby," appeared in our issue of October 1979. His second story, altogether different in concept and style, is as unusual and imaginative as his debut in print . . .

COMMUTE TO MURDER

by RICHARD GRANT

George Sterndale raced past the portable bar and hurried down the platform toward his train. He desperately needed a drink, but it wouldn't look good. He never had a drink on the train, and tonight of all nights he shouldn't start.

The Croton-Harmon local was at the end of the platform and was packed; some people were already standing in the aisles. He walked past the first three cars crammed with people and looked into the fourth. It contained only a half-dozen passengers. Another Conrail special—no air conditioning. In these new cars the windows wouldn't open, and inside there'd be a hundred degrees of hot, humid, stuffy air.

But it meant a seat and less chance of running into someone he knew. Tonight Sterndale needed both those things.

He removed his coat, loosened his tie, and took a seat. Between the run down the platform, the stillness of the air in the car, and his general nervousness, he was sweating profusely. He looked out the window into the black halls of the terminal beneath Grand Central Station and tried to think. It wasn't easy, and a second later it became impossible.

A heavy man in a black suit grunted and squeezed himself into the seat opposite Sterndale. He was carrying a cheap suitcase and a shopping bag which appeared to be stuffed with clothes. In an infuriatingly slow pace he tried to stuff the bag under the seat. It

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wouldn't fit, but he continued to try, grunting and breathing heavily all the while. Sterndale felt like screaming at him to stop.

Eventually the heavy man gave up and with sweat pouring out of his face, sat back in his seat, smiled at Sterndale, and bowed his head slightly. "It won't fit," he said with some middle-European accent Sterndale couldn't place.

Sterndale said nothing and looked out the window.

"It is a present for my niece. I have not seen her in ten years. I go now up to Clarendon on Hudson to visit with her."

Damn him, and damn his niece, Sterndale thought, but said nothing. Of all the luck . . . and he was going all the way to his stop too! He needed to think, he needed to get himself under control.

"I have twelve nieces and fourteen nephews," the fat man continued. "They range in age from two months to twenty-eight years."

"What do I look like, the *Guinness World Book of Records?*" Sterndale felt like saying, but instead he nodded his head and looked around for another seat. On cue the train lurched forward and a conductor materialized by his side. He'd ridden the train every workday for ten years, and never had a conductor asked him for a ticket so soon after leaving the station.

Sterndale showed him his commuter pass while the fat man fumbled for his ticket. It had been oppressive in the car before; now the heat was becoming unbearable. And now moving his seat was out of the question. The conductor had seen him here—had marked his seat with a ticket stub. If he moved, if he did anything out of the ordinary, it might be brought up later. He had to be just another hot, tired commuter coming home from work with no idea that his wife was now dead in that home, lying in a pool of her own blood.

Would there be blood? he thought quickly. He didn't know. Anders had been specific on some points and casual on others. The plan Anders laid out was stamped on Sterndale's mind. He could even recall Anders' exact wording. "It will take place in the afternoon between Monday and Friday the week of September 21. You won't know which day. This will give me flexibility and it will help you act appropriately. You've got to act shocked—if you don't know when it's coming, you'll do a better job. I'll make it look like a robbery, so don't worry about that end of it. The thing to remember is that she won't pick you up at the station on the day I do it. Don't overreact at the station. Wait around, when she doesn't show up, calmly go to a phone and call her. After that go to a cab driver and take a cab home. Don't be overly anxious in the cab. Complain about your

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wife having only one thing to do every day—pick you up at the station—and she can't even manage to do that. The cab driver will be called to testify. Anyone you talk to on the train will be questioned by the police. You've got to remain calm until you walk into the door of your house. And you only get one shot at this. Blow it, and—well, you get the picture."

Sterndale got the picture. Just as he'd got it on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday nights. It was now Thursday, it had to be today. Anders wouldn't wait until Friday. No, today was the day he would complete the contract, and Sterndale had to remain calm until the moment he discovered his wife had been killed in a robbery attempt.

"This niece I go visit is a very nice girl. She has two children, ages two and four."

Sterndale turned on the fat man and was about to curse his nieces when he caught sight of the big man's eyes. They were soft brown, sunken in rolls of flesh, and they looked troubled and yet sympathetic at the same time. "You are disturbed tonight, yes?" the fat man asked.

"Ah, no. Not at all. Just a little tired," Sterndale said, looking down so as not to meet the other man's gaze.

"I think it is maybe more than that. I think you are worried about your wife, yes?"

"What? What did you say?" Sterndale tried to take the urgency out of his voice, but failed. The sweat on the back of his shirt began to chill.

"You are worried that some violent thing has happened to her."

Calm, remain calm, Sterndale told himself. He realized he was gripping the arm rest with all his strength. He relaxed his arms and said as nonchalantly as he could, "Why do you say that?"

"I am sometimes what you call psychic. I have been this way all my life. I see things and hear things that others do not. It does not happen all the time, but when someone is upset—like you are tonight—the signal is very strong."

"And what is this 'signal' that you're picking up?"

"You are thinking for some time that something will happen to your wife, but now you are sure. You think she is dead, but you do not know how. I am sorry, I am upsetting you, yes?"

"Well, of course. You're wrong. That's not what I was thinking at all, but it's—it's, yes, it's very unsettling to hear you say that." Think! Think, you idiot, Sterndale shouted at himself. Don't overreact. So you've met some kook on the train. No one's going to believe

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a psychic. If they talk to him, if they ever even find him, the only thing the police will be interested in is how you reacted to what he said.

Sterndale crossed his legs and wiped the sweat from his palms on to the seat. "It must be very interesting—being a psychic."

"No, I sometimes think it is a curse. When people are suffering near me, I suffer too. I am suffering now. You are worried about a man named Anders."

Sterndale felt a thump in his chest, as if someone had slammed him with a sledgehammer. He tried to speak but his mouth was too dry. He shook his head.

He'd never believed in any of this psychic business and part of his shock was the undeniable proof that it did exist. How far was the range, he wondered. If he left the car, would that put him out of the fat man's ability to read his mind? But that would look suspicious. Was the fat man reading his mind right now? Oh, God, why? Why, of all days did this psychological freak have to sit next to him?

You're blowing it, Sterndale, he told himself. You're looking suspicious. Say something. "You're crazy," he said. "I don't know what you're talking about, but I think I've heard enough of it."

The fat man gazed at him with knowing eyes. "Yes, I can understand now how you feel."

"What do you mean by that?" Sterndale realized there was a crazed edge to his voice, but he could do nothing to control it. "What are you saying?"

"I think we have said enough," the fat man said coldly.

Did he know? He knew about Anders. Surely if he could pick that up he could pick up the rest. Oh, God. What to do? He could kill the fat man, but that would require planning. He couldn't think straight enough now to tie his own shoe, let alone pull off a murder.

Would anybody believe the man? Believe a psychic with a thick accent? Of course not. But it might start them thinking. If they did a little digging, the whole plot might come unraveled.

Why, damn it, why did he have to sit in this seat tonight?

There was one hope. It flooded over Sterndale and seized every cell in his body. Maybe Anders hadn't made his move today. Maybe his wife would be there at the station. Yes. He hadn't done it yet this week, why should he have done it today? If his wife was at the station, that would be the end of it. He'd call Anders tonight and cancel the contract. Let him keep the money. It was crazy to ever have thought of killing her. Why did he do it in the first place? To

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save money. Well, what good was money if he went to jail? Better to just divorce her and take a financial bath. Yes, please, let her be at the station.

He looked out the window and watched the sun sparkle off the Hudson River. The air in the car was more stifling than ever and the fat man was emitting a terrible odor, but Sterndale hardly noticed. He had hope.

When the train pulled into Clarendon, Sterndale practically bounded from his seat. The fat man fixed him with a disapproving gaze, but Sterndale didn't mind. His wife was out there—he knew that—and this whole nightmare would be over in a minute.

But she wasn't out there.

He looked everywhere, desperate to find a glimpse of their powder-blue Volvo. Passengers got off, climbed into the waiting cars, and drove off. Sterndale began to get frantic. If today was the day, he'd never be able to pull it off. The fat man was down at the other end of the platform, waiting also, and still there was no sign of the Volvo.

He paced back and forth. The last of the cars left the station. Should he call her? Could he act calm in a taxi? No, damn it, he couldn't. He looked down the platform again. There was no one on it but himself, the fat man, and a tall muscular-looking fellow with short blond hair and wearing a neat navy-blue suit. The tall man and the fat man were deep in conversation. Then they turned and started walking toward him.

Police? It couldn't be. What could the fat man have possibly said? The tall man came closer. He had a rugged, sunburned face with black-framed sunglasses. He looked like a cop to Sterndale. He walked up very close and said, "Mr. Sterndale?"

"Yes?" Sterndale felt weak. His knees were trembling and his stomach was heaving.

"We've never met, but we've talked on the phone. My name is Anders."

Sterndale recognized the voice. "What's happened? What went wrong? We were never to meet! What have you done?"

"Calm down, you're making a scene."

Sterndale quickly looked around him. There was no one in sight.

"I haven't done anything, Mr. Sterndale, except give your wife's car two flat tires. Nor do I intend to do anything. I've been in this business for ten years. I've successfully completed thirty-five contracts without so much as ever being questioned by the police. I don't intend to break that record now."

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"But—" Sterndale looked helplessly at the fat man.

"This is Mr. Thomas, an associate of mine. He followed you on to the train to see how stable you were. A standard precaution of mine. I believe he used his psychic routine. You did not pass the test, Mr. Sterndale."

The fat man showed a trace of smile and made a small bow.

"Should I have completed the contract, your little episode with Thomas is nothing compared to the grilling the police would have given you. They are not so stupid as you might think. They would find difficulties in your marriage, they would trace the money you withdrew from your bank account to pay me, they would work on you and work on you and work on you until they were satisfied you had nothing to do with it. And as we have seen this evening, you would not be able to stand the pressure."

Anders pulled a white envelope from within his coat. "I don't know what the problem is between you and your wife, Sterndale, nor do I care. I do know that murder is not a viable alternative for you. At least not with me. You would most certainly crack under police pressure and in all likelihood implicate me in the scheme. I am returning four thousand of the ten thousand you paid me. The rest I am keeping for my time and expenses. I would suggest you work out your differences with your wife in a more conventional manner. You do not have the temperament necessary to complete a successful murder."

Sterndale grabbed the envelope and hastily stuffed it in his coat. His face was white and his hands were shaking, but he nodded his head. "You're right. I'm . . . I'm very grateful to you. I don't know what got into me . . . I . . ." He stuck his hand out.

Anders did not shake it.

"Well, I . . . thanks again," Sterndale said, and ran down the platform to the taxi stand.

Thomas waited until he was out of sight, then smiled broadly. When he spoke it was without a trace of accent. "Thirty-five successful contracts is it now? You become a more dangerous character every time I see you."

"Must keep up the image," Anders replied. "A rather successful evening, I would say."

"I think you could have taken him for the whole ten thousand."

"Mustn't be greedy, Thomas. I'm in the business of education—I'm not a common con artist. I teach people the folly of considering

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murder and for that I charge a not unreasonable fee, predetermined according to the client's ability to pay."

"Well, maybe," Thomas conceded as they crossed the platform to wait for the return train to New York. "But we take the same risks, so why shouldn't we get as much as we can?"

"My dear Thomas, what risks? It is not, to my knowledge, against the laws of this state to *not* commit a murder."

"Yes, but someday someone is going to contract you and not be scared off so easily. Then what will you do? You've never killed anybody and I don't suppose you care to start."

"No, but we will cross that bridge, as we have just crossed this platform, when we come to it."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

KILLER DILLER

by GLORINE MORSE

A dapper assassin named Bill
Had a contract he needed to fill,
But he wouldn't shoot
Till he got a new suit—
Then he said, "Now I'm dressed fit to kill."

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a *NEW* detective story by

JAMES POWELL

If our records are correct, it is nearly seven years since we last published a detective Ganelon story (too long, too long!). This new one is a welcome return by a member of our surprisingly large family of sui generis (irresistible and inimitable) authors. James Powell is a master of imaginative, chuckling, and delicious detail . . .

Pity the poor criminal living in the Principality of San Sebastiano who is up against, as adversaries and nemeses, the detectives Ganelon, father and son . . .

BLIND MAN'S CUFF

by JAMES POWELL

A few minutes after dawn on a foggy San Sebastiano morning in 1932 the only light shining in the rue Blondin came from the window of a snug dining room on the third floor of number 18 bos. There at the head of the polished table, erect in old age, sat Ambrose Ganelon, the second of that name, wearing the brocaded ceremonial uniform of a member of the Royal Academy. (The cloak, cocked hat, and sword lay across a chair in the front hallway.) Since his retirement from the Ganelon Agency the old detective had spent much of his time working on the revisions of the scientific articles for the new edition of the *Encyclopaedia Academica.*

The other person at the table was his son, "the current Ambrose Ganelon," as the newspapers were already describing him—a dark-haired, broad-shouldered man whose face at rest still bore traces of that lopsided grin which women found irresistible. He wore evening dress except for the tie which hung on the clothes tree in the front

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hallway alongside his trench coat, automatic, and shoulder holster. Shirtsleeves were not permitted at the table.

This Ganelon was tired, having just come from an all-night party on Apollo Apollinaris' yacht. And he was tired in spirit, too. His grandfather, the first Ambrose Ganelon, the founder of the agency, had been the greatest of all armchair detectives; his father had been a scientific criminologist of world renown. When his own turn came, Ganelon III decided to be a detective of the scrappy, wenching, drinking school. A great idea at eighteen. A good one at twenty-five. But now he was on the shady side of thirty and the late hours were getting to him, he was losing his taste for Scotch, and recently he had half decided his was the kind of head that looked better in a homburg than a fedora.

"Eighteen ninety-two," continued his father. "Now there was a year for fog. Thick, orange, and impenetrable." The old man popped a morsel of warm croissant into his mouth and wiped his fingertips on his napkin. "Certain twisted souls find mere shadows are not enough to hide their evil deeds," he said. "They must wear the double cloak of darkness and fog. Jacques le Guillotine was just such a creature."

Smiling, Ganelon lit a cigarette and blew the smoke out through his clenched teeth. A story from his father before he went to bed was like old times.

"Jacques le Guillotine killed nine ladies of the evening during those weeks of fog," said the old detective, "strangling them and then cutting off their heads with a great blade of blue steel he carried in a scabbard under his overcoat. He left the torsos there in the streets and carried away the severed heads in a man's hatbox."

"Why?" asked his son.

"You'll find the answer to that in some dark corner of his childhood, I expect," answered the old man.

"I meant why did he take the heads."

"Eyeprints," explained his father. "There was an old belief, continuing up to Jacques le Guillotine's day, that the last thing a dying person saw remained permanently on the retina of his eye. We all eagerly expected the invention of a process for developing that image. Just imagine the victim's eyes pointing the accusing finger from beyond the grave! No, Jacques le Guillotine couldn't leave those heads behind. And they were to lead me to him."

Hortense, the housekeeper, appeared in the dining-room doorway, her large jaw set at a determined angle. Ganelon's father tensed and

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then asked smoothly, "Yes, Hortense?" Since the death of Ganelon's mother the housekeeper had become increasingly domineering. Ganelon believed his father less interested in his marrying to provide an heir than to provide a wife who would put Hortense in her place.

"There's a young lady with an appointment to see Mr. Ambrose, sir," announced Hortense.

The old man looked at his puzzled son. "Are we starting to receive clients here and at this hour?"

"I was the one who told her to come, sir," said the housekeeper. "Office hours are all well and good for your rich friends but they are inconvenient for a working girl who spends ten hours a day at the Stitchery Espagnac sewing tourist-trade cushions in the shape of St. Sebastian."

"Please show your friend in, Hortense," said Ganelon's father, no doubt looking forward to a nice dessert for lunch.

Hortense returned with a fresh-faced young woman dressed in black. Her short chestnut hair peeked from beneath a felt hat. Her embarrassment grew when the two men rose to greet her. "Miss Marie Allard," announced Hortense.

"Won't you have a cup of coffee with us, Miss Allard?" asked Ganelon's father. "Please don't think we're eccentrics who dress for breakfast. My son was working late and I'm leaving shortly for the Academy."

"You look very learned, sir," said Miss Allard.

Smiling to see his father's ears blush, Ganelon said, "What can we do for you, Miss Allard?"

Hortense returned with a cup of coffee which their visitor tasted politely before saying, "Last night as he was coming home from work in the fog my father was shot down and murdered in the rue St. Joseph. The police call it attempted robbery. They say the thief heard someone coming, panicked, shot my father, dropped the cat's-eye stickpin he'd snatched from his tie, and ran. But nobody was coming, Mr. Ganelon. The body lay there under the street light for twenty minutes before it was found."

"Just how do the police know that?"

"My father was blind, Mr. Ganelon," declared the young woman. "He always came home the same way at the same time. He said regularity helped him find his steps. Sometimes I'd walk along with him. He always reached the clock in the photographer's window in the rue St. Joseph at 8:17. That's where his body was found twenty minutes later." She leaned forward. "My father was an anarchist,

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Mr. Ganelon. He worked hard for the nonviolent overthrow of society as we know it. Reactionary groups of the darkest stripe have sworn to avenge themselves on his kind. The Committee for a Return to the Status Quo Ante for one. The Defenders of Yesterday for another. And just between us I think the Defenders have infiltrated the police."

Ganelon knew the Committee, a long-winded fascist alliance. The Defenders of Yesterday liked to march about wearing armbands with their insignia—an arrow pointing backward in a bent bow. Ganelon scratched the stubble along his jawbone with a thumbnail. He doubted infiltration of the police. Since the fall of the government two weeks before, the political extremes had been seeing conspiracy behind every bush. Perhaps things would quiet down now that the Prince had called on the colorless Talbot-Severin to form a coalition of the Center.

"All right, I'll look into your father's death, Miss Allard," said Ganelon, hoping to set her mind at rest. "How can I get in touch with you?"

"My older sisters and I will have to do our mourning at work," she said. "There are five more of us still in school and the funeral expenses to pay for. But I take my lunch in the park across from where I work." She got to her feet, nodded gratefully at Ganelon's father, and shook the detective's hand.

"A fine young woman," said the older man when she had gone. "Handsome and healthy. A good mother, I should imagine. And Hortense seems to hold her in some awe."

Ganelon lit a final cigarette to finish his coffee. "What about eyeprints?" he asked.

"Ah, yes, well, my father invested tens of thousands in the search for an eyeprints process. And he brought the famous Dr. Humbolt Cooke here and set him up in a laboratory on the second floor. It was Dr. Cooke who pointed me along the path I have taken. I can still see his cheery smile as he emerged like a summoned demon from one of his lab explosions to explain what he'd done wrong. And I remember Obsidian, the Resurrection man, in his slouch hat. I'll never forget the sound his barrow made on the midnight cobbles and his hollow knock when he made delivery of the heads from new graves.

"Later they discovered that fresh heads were not needed. And Obsidian's Italian agent forwarded a supply packed in brine following Garibaldi's defeat at Mentana. They were kept in a cistern in

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the subbasement. Dr. Cooke insisted that if Rossini was being performed at the Opera, those cistern waters would stir and heads would rise to the surface with their ears cocked. Once when I went down with him he hummed something from *Semiramide*. I thought I saw the waters wrinkle and fled back up the stairs with his friendly laughter at my back." Halfway into a smile the old man looked around at the dining-room clock. "I'll be late."

Back in his bedroom Ganelon stood at the window without turning on the light and finished his cigarette. He saw his father emerge from the doorway of the building and into the foggy street. The old man stood at the curb under the street light in cape and cocked hat. It couldn't have been more than thirty seconds before the heavy, ornate horse-drawn carriage which collected the Academicians six at a time lumbered out of the fog. The old man mounted the running board of the ancient vehicle, saluted its wise occupants, stepped inside, and closed the door behind him.

By 10:30, having got all the sleep he was going to get, Ganelon was parking his white Terrapin convertible in front of the Morgue. The Prefecture had referred him there when he asked for Assistant Inspector Picardy who was handling the Allard case.

As he went up the front steps Ganelon wondered about Picardy's politics. The man had served with the air ace Emile Scarlat and his famous squadron, the Flying Fourth, during the World War. But aviators seemed drawn to right-wing causes. He thought of d'Annunzio, the Italian Balbo, and more recently Scarlat's old enemy in the air, Hermann Goering. Ganelon had always regarded Picardy as a capable apolitical type. Still, a year ago his wife had died and he had taken it quite hard. A thing like that could change your thinking.

Picardy was coming out of the Coroner's office studying two folders. He smiled interrogatively when he saw Ganelon. Some police fawned on the Ganelons. Others resented them. To Picardy they were friendly aircraft.

They shook hands. When Ganelon explained why he'd come Picardy seemed amused. He said, "About two minutes into our interview I sensed I'd lost Miss Allard's confidence. She hinted at her father's enemies, then seemed to think better of talking about them to the police. Now I think I know why." He handed Ganelon one of the files. "There was another shooting last night. Around seven o'clock someone killed Agnes Verton, a prostitute in the rue Passy."

According to the file, the woman had been shot once in the heart

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with a brass-cased bullet from a Czech pistol, a Hrosco .32 which until five years ago had been army issue in the Principality. "Any witnesses?" asked Ganelon.

"One of her competitors three lamp posts down thought she saw the figure of a man limp off into the fog," said Picardy, handing over the second folder.

The blind man had been shot once in the chest at close range by a brass-cased bullet from a Hrosco .32.

"We're canvassing the area but no witnesses yet on the Allard killing," said Picardy. "But I do have reports that Allard's house was a brothel. I hope this isn't the start of a vice war. Like the one you were in the thick of when Lady Emerald Fong tried to take over prostitution here. I told Wolfert—Agnes Verton worked out of that charming gent's stable—that I want to be the first to know if he hears anything in that direction."

Ganelon doubted if Miss Allard was what his father would call "a lady of the evening," but it was clear she was keeping something back. He asked to see the dead man's things. On the way down to Personal Effects he jabbed his chin at Picardy's lapel. "When did you join the Defenders of Yesterday?"

Picardy frowned. Then he turned up his lapel and looked at the silver pin there. "No. That was my squadron during the war. The Flying Fourth. But by God you're right. Knock the bottom barb off the arrow and it does look like their lunatic backwards arrow in a bow. Damn." Picardy knocked on the Personal Effects window and spoke to the attendant.

Ganelon sorted through Allard's things until he found the bloody shirt. He ran two fingers around the inside of the left cuff. He held the cuff up to the light and showed Picardy the series of small perforations in the material. "Braille. He used his stickpin. Does the name Blue Peter mean anything to you?"

Picardy shook his head. "You think maybe he recognized his killer's voice?"

The small park across from the Stitchery Espagnac surrounded a fountain depicting the Spirit of Invention. Ganelon was a few minutes early. His father was already there, sitting on a bench in his Academician's finery, his sword between his knees. "I decided to walk this far and get a ride home with you, my boy. Miss Allard's case interests me."

Ganelon lit a cigarette and brought his father up to date. As he

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was speaking, a crowd of women pushed out of the building across the street and onto the sidewalk. Marie Allard, arm in arm with five other young women whom Ganelon took to be her sisters, was among those who took lunch in the park. She left her companions at a bench near the park entrance and approached Ganelon and his father. She sat down with a shy smile, opened her lunch, and started to raise her sandwich to her lips. Then she blushed and offered part of it to each of them in turn.

Ganelon shook his head.

"I'll share your apple, Miss Allard," said his father. When the young woman surrendered the apple, the old detective set his cocked hat upside-down on the grass and drew his sword. He tossed the apple two feet in the air and split it neatly at the top of its arc. The halves fell into the hat. He presented one half to the young woman and took the other for himself.

Ganelon asked, "Miss Allard, among the clientèle of your father's house was there anyone called Blue Peter?"

The young woman sighed deeply. "You don't believe my father was killed by the Defenders of Yesterday or people like that, do you, Mr. Ganelon?"

The detective shook his head. "Why would they want to kill"—then out of deference to his father—"a lady of the evening in the rue Passy?"

She thought about that. Then she said, "All right, my father operated a kind of school for anarchists. But with all the young men coming and going he was afraid the reactionaries would find out about it. So he spread the story our house was a brothel. It worked like a charm except for one or two incidents at the front door whenever the fleet was in. Looking back on it, I can see he wasn't doing much for our chances of ever getting beaux or husbands."

Ganelon got up. His father stood up too and put on his hat so he could tip it as they left. "One last question," said Ganelon. "Your father was killed coming home from work, you said. What did he do?"

"My father was a blender for a perfume company."

Ganelon spent an hour with lunch on a tray going over the current cases with his office manager. When he came back down to his car his father was waiting for him, wearing a dark suit and carrying his favorite cane."I find I'm free this afternoon," the old man said.

They drove to the rue Passy where they separated temporarily.

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Ganelon paid a visit to the Café Metropole, a chrome corner with wicker chairs and iron tables separated from the sidewalk by a low rampart of evergreens. Within a potted bower two tables of expensive hats with extraordinary brims and rare feathers, overcoats with accordion pleating in the back, bright silk shirts and pinstripe suits were taking their breakfast coffee. The near table rummaged through a rat-faced fence's jewelry case, trying on pinky rings. Wolfert's table was engrossed in the *Echo de Beaulieu*, the Principality's turf sheet.

At Ganelon's appearance several of the more high-strung suits of clothes headed for the men's room. Ganelon passed through the scowls and mutters of those that remained. He sat down in a place now vacant at Wolfert's side. Wolfert had a forgettable face except for the large puckered circle of a scar on his left cheek where someone had once rammed a broken beer bottle and then twisted it. Sweat broke out on Wolfert's brow like a welcoming smile.

"Heard about your loss," said the detective.

"A damn shame," said Wolfert, pressing a mauve pocket handkerchief to his brow. "She was like a sister to me." He looked at the handkerchief as if relieved to see he wasn't sweating blood. "I've had to ask the others to take up the slack. Too bad. I'd planned a surprise for the whole troupe—a Sunday outing at Bain la Mairie. Some well deserved sun, sea, and surf. But we're in mourning now. So much for that. The work must go on. Agnes would have wanted that."

"Some questions," said Ganelon.

Wolfert, watching his fingers arrange the handkerchief in his breast pocket, shrugged. "Questions won't bring Agnes back. They won't mend our broken hearts."

"Answers might keep you from getting thrown under a cross-town bus," suggested Ganelon.

Wolfert nodded from behind his coffee cup as though that was a very good point. He set his cup down decisively. "You're a hundred percent right. We can't let this animal stalk our streets. Shoot."

"How long was she with you and where did she come from?"

"About three years," said Wolfert. "From where? Who knows? We don't ask for references."

A young man at the table found this very funny. He didn't stop laughing until Ganelon looked at him. "What else?" the detective said.

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Wolfert made a show of racking his brain. Then he shook his head. "She was just like the rest."

Ganelon stared out into the street as if looking for a bus.

"All right," said Wolfert. "Before she came to me some guy had set her up in an apartment. I hear they had a little blackmail thing going."

Just then Ganelon's father appeared, carrying a paper bag striped with the colors of the local perfumery. His arrival was a stone thrown into the surly pond of the other table. The old detective had allowed *Underworld Tailor and Cutter* to talk him into drawing up this year's list of the ten best dressed criminals in the Principality. Wolfert's colleagues, long accustomed to sweeping the awards, found themselves replaced by a collection of counterfeit bond salesmen, a fashionable racetrack pickpocket, and two society jewel thieves.

As hands reached inside jackets for straight razors—the old detective's commentary had remarked on those unsightly bulges—Ganelon decided to create a diversion by pulling Wolfert to his feet and punching him in the face. The man dropped like a stone. These were close quarters for fighting, with the potted evergreens on one side and the café window on the other. It thinned things out when the young man with the snicker drove through the greenery and fled down the sidewalk. But his two companions decided to stand and fight.

Ducking a roundhouse punch, Ganelon rammed the edge of the table top into as many of their kneecaps as he could hit. He only scored on three. One man toppled to the floor with a groan. The other hopped up and down in pain on one leg until he was dropped with a punch.

A loose razor sailed by Ganelon's ear. He turned to find his father, that D'Artagnan of cane fencing, had just disarmed the last but one of the five men at the other table. The four out of action stood nursing their bruised and broken knuckles in their armpits while Ganelon's father played and parried with the fifth, a puffing bull of a man in chocolate pinstripes. As he drove his opponent this way and that, the old man calmly lectured him on sartorial good taste. "And last but not least," he said, adroitly cracking the man across the knuckles and then batting the razor from the now useless hand, "a gentleman does not wear brown in the city."

The steel shutters were down on the front of the photographer's studio on the rue St. Joseph. A plainclothed policeman standing at

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the street door leading to the apartment above stepped aside to let Ganelon and his father pass. "Assistant Inspector Picardy's upstairs with the body, gentlemen."

The apartment door stood open, the living room in disarray. Papers were scattered on the floor around the red lacquer secretary. The tiger-skin rug had been thrown back. Books had been pulled from their shelves. Chin in hand, Picardy was staring down at the body of a fat man in carpet slippers and tasseled fez. The wine-colored smoking jacket made it difficult at first to see the blood.

"Achille Rambeau," said the policeman, introducing the newcomers to the corpse. "He ran the photographic studio downstairs. My men came back this afternoon looking for someone who might have heard the shot or seen something. When they reported the studio still shuttered up I came over."

"Rambeau had a little sideline," said Ganelon. "One involving Agnes Verton."

"If it was blackmail I don't think the murderer found what he was after," said Picardy. "He looked in too many places."

Ganelon's father regarded the room with its incense burners and rattan aviary filled with bright stuffed tropical birds. "A gaudy man, our Mr. Rambeau," he observed with a cocked eyebrow. He applied the fastidious tip of his index finger to the upper corner of the cover of a folio volume on the coffee table, opened the book, and closed it again. "With a taste for photographs of young boys." Then he crossed over to a reproduction of Pardessus' "Madonna of San Sebastiano" on the wall. "Pardessus did too many pictures of madonna-and-child for this to be the late gentleman's preference. I suspect a patented contrivance." The picture frame swung out from the wall to reveal a small steel door.

Ganelon looked at Picardy who unclipped a bunch of keys from the dead man's keychain and tossed them over. Ganelon unlocked the door and drew out a stack of manila envelopes and a penny scribbler bound together with an elastic band. He handed the envelopes to Picardy and examined the scribbler himself. As if to show contrition at having intruded too far into his son's case, the old detective turned his attention to a shelf of carved Japanese netsuke.

"Rambeau really did get the skin tones," said Picardy, skimming through the photos. Then he stopped. "Here's one where the woman's Agnes Verton. And here's another."

Ganelon looked up from the scribbler. "As I read it, about four years ago Rambeau went into the blackmail business in a modest

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way. Here are the victims listed alphabetically, each with his own page, back and front, with the entries of the monthly payments. Rambeau doesn't seem to have been a greedy man. Look here at this clipping. This man won a thousand francs in the lottery. So for that month his payment was doubled. Then it went back down again. No killing the goose that laid the golden egg for Rambeau."

Picardy had separated all the photos in which Agnes Verton appeared. "Our murderer has to be one of these."

Ganelon lit a cigarette. "So he kills Rambeau and beats it without the blackmail photo? All right, I guess that's no more stupid than killing the Verton woman who was only a hired hand." Ganelon crossed to the window and looked outside. "But now let's try it another way. Let's ask ourselves why, after years of meeting Rambeau's modest demands, our man turns around and kills him. Well, let's suppose he knows he's going to strike it rich like the lottery winner. Something big enough to make the papers—so big, in fact, that he can't rely on Rambeau keeping his demands reasonable any more. A promotion at work, a sizable inheritance, a marriage into money. So he must kill his blackmailer.

"But suppose he does? When Agnes Verton reads about him in the papers, she might connect his good fortune and the blackmailer's death and go to the police. Or try a little blackmail on her own. So he must kill Agnes Verton. Not because she has anything on him. But because she soon might."

He turned back into the room. "Now if he's smart enough to figure all that out, I think he'd be smart enough to look behind a picture for a wall safe. And he'd unlock it as we just did, taking his envelope out of the stack and tearing his page out of the scribbler. He locks up again and returns the keys to Rambeau's keychain. All that's left is a minute or two of fake ransacking and the job's done. Then he runs down the stairs, and steps out into the street.

"At just that moment poor blind Allard, full-time perfume blender and part-time anarchist, passes under the street light on his way home from work. He smells the murderer's cologne and a look of recognition crosses his face. Blue Peter cologne. But the murderer thinks *he's* what's been recognized. He has already killed twice that evening. He uses the gun again and slips away in the fog." Ganelon waved the scribbler. "Leaving behind him thirty-three suspects for the police to investigate."

"Thirty-four," Picardy corrected him. "At least that's how many photos I've got."

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Quickly Ganelon opened the scribbler and read off the names. Picardy set the envelopes aside until there was only one left. "Dr. Emile Vosges," said Picardy, consulting the envelope. He showed Ganelon the photo of a naked man with a neat beard staring with astonished eyes into a camera from a litter of bedsheets. The man's carefully folded clothes could be seen on a bedside chair topped with his wire-rimmed glasses.

Ganelon shook his head sadly. "Vosges isn't our man. That woman isn't Agnes Verton." As he spoke he noted his father had abandoned the netsuke shelf to listen.

"Damn," said Picardy. "I thought we had him."

"Don't throw in the towel yet," said Ganelon, consulting the scribbler. "Even if Vosges isn't our man he does tell us that the murderer's last initial falls between Mr. Hameau here and Mr. Jory." Out of the corner of his eye he was pleased to see his father's approving nod. He continued, "The scribbler is bound together by a pair of stitches. When the murderer tore out his page, Vosges' page came out too. The murderer had to take it along with him. Otherwise he would have given himself away. In addition we know he has a limp which might be service connected. And he's about to make the headlines. And he won't be able to account for his time last night between seven and eight seventeen."

Ganelon's father stepped forward and drew a small bottle of men's cologne from the paper bag. "And we have this. A 'noseprint,' so to speak. We know the murderer uses a cologne which I am told is expensive and directed to the nautical crowd. Blue Peter. The name of the flag a ship hoists when it's about to leave harbor. A blind man's nose has pointed an accusing finger from beyond the grave."

"Cheer up, Picardy," said Ganelon, looking at his watch. "Is the Principality all that big? I'm running late. Drinks at the Countess Xenia's. Got to change. Dad, can I drop you somewhere? Picardy, do me a favor and stop by the Stitchery Espagnac at closing time and tell Miss Allard how we're progressing. Unless I'm wrong you owe her an apology."

The next morning Ganelon's father entered the dining room with the squeak and tinkle of leather harness, wearing the dress uniform of a major in the Tripoline Lancers. He sat down to spend a few minutes with his son. He was receiving Communion and would breakfast later. It was Magnusmas Day when the members of San Sebastiano's Intelligence Service gathered behind locked doors in

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the Church of St. Magnus the Great for a secret mass in honor of their patron. Afterward a caravan of closed limousines would carry the participants to a private breakfast at the Army and Navy Club. Some believed Ganelon's father was himself the Principality's entire Intelligence Service and that all the limousines were empty except the one carrying him and Monsignor Fleury, the service's blind chaplain.

"My boy, you're working much too hard," the old man said. "In my day some cases could be investigated before midnight."

"Like Jacques le Guillotine?" asked Ganelon.

"Ah, I never finished that story, did I? Did I explain why the man cut off the heads of his victims? Good. Well, soon grisly burlap bags weighted down with cobblestones were turning up in fishermen's nets. Now, even after 1848 when Baron du Thon widened the boulevards so cavalry could maneuver against the populace and macadamed them so there were no cobblestones to make barricades with, there were still seventy-three different kinds of cobblestones in the Principality's side streets, all put down at various times and of different stone and shapes. I believe, as a boy, I had the finest cobblestone collection in the city under my bed and in the clothes closet—until my mother, your grandmother, discovered it.

"The cobblestones in those burlap bags could only have come from two busy streets off the Place d'Iota. And now the same fog that protected Jacques le Guillotine gave him away. It brought traffic to a standstill and in the silence a picket of listening police soon heard the shriek of a large blue blade being sharpened on a treadle-driven grindstone."

Here Hortense came in with the morning paper on a tray and a warning. "If the Allards get a bill, you can bet I'll hear about it."

When she had gone Ganelon's father shook his head. "A pity for you Picardy saw Miss Allard first."

Ganelon had already retreated behind the gray rampart of the *Factotum du Matin*, heading straight for the social notices.

"Of course," observed his father, "each of her sisters seemed an attractive and spirited facsimile."

Ganelon rattled the pages noisily as he turned to the obituaries. Last initials between Hameau and Jory seemed to be singularly inactive. He turned to the business section.

Left alone, his father began to read out loud from the front-page headlines. " 'Talbot-Severin Chooses Cabinet of Unknowns. New Government Scrapes Bottom of Political Barrel'." His father clucked

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his tongue. "I'll say. Listen to this. Minister of Defense, Lalonde. He couldn't even keep awake on sentry duty. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Thomas. He stutters when he lies! And here's one even I'm not familiar with. Minister of Justice, Alain Hubert. But I imagine he can't be all that bad. It says here that he was wounded during the Second Battle of Montsouris. And he's wearing a Royal Yacht Club tie."

Ganelon twisted the paper around to see. Then he smiled at his smiling father. "I'll tell Picardy to drop by Mr. Hubert's and sniff around in a congratulatory way," the detective said. "If he acts quickly enough he may save the government a very large embarrassment. The gratitude of a Prime Minister never hurt a policeman in his career."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

FATHERLY ADVICE

by RUTH R. KINGSLEY

When Abel was dastardly slain,
Old Adam could barely refrain
From saying to Eve,
"Now will you believe?
"I *told* you to stop raising Cain!"

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a *NEW* short story by

GEORGE BAXT

Elsie was a heroine of the student uprisings and antiwar protests of the sixties. Harold was the shining knight who rescued her from the police bullets peppering the campus. But that was long ago and far away.

Can the passing years have so changed those serious times that life today has more than a touch of Dark Humor, and death today has more than a touch of the Absurd?

SHOW ME A HERO

by GEORGE BAXT

Getting out of bed that morning, for Harold Nelson, had been an act of courage. He hadn't slept much that night. In fact, he couldn't remember how long it had been since he'd had a decent night's sleep. He couldn't remember the last time he'd heard the alarm on his clock startle him awake. Since he'd left the bed he had been sharing with his wife, Elsie the cow, and moved into what was supposed to have been the nursery (he bought the cot he was sleeping on at a surplus-store sale), frustrations, anxieties, and dark depressions hammered at his being until he seriously contemplated suicide.

When he wasn't seriously contemplating murder.

Elsie the Cow. He didn't know until about a year ago that was how the neighborhood kids referred to his wife. A few months later he realized the appellation was epidemic. Everybody in town called her Elsie the Cow. At first he was indignant and outraged because this was his wife, his sweetheart, his lover, and how dare these fools disparage so kind and loving a creature?

But kindness and lovingness were some of her attributes of fifteen years ago, and Harold finally had to admit to himself she was no

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longer kind and loving and weighed approximately seventy or eighty pounds more than she weighed when they fell in love way back in the days of student uprisings and anti-war protests. In those days he saw her as Joan of Arc. Today when he looked at her at breakfast, she seemed to have died during the night and was slowly decomposing.

Guilt poked him in the stomach as he tried to rearrange himself on the uncomfortable cot. He didn't want to get up yet. He didn't know what to do about his marriage. He had asked her for a divorce so often that she suggested he put it on a tape and save his breath. She would never divorce him and that was that. It wasn't her fault he had the bad taste to fall in love with a younger and prettier (let alone slimmer) woman.

Elsie sometimes wondered how he would react if she told him she was still in love with him, sometimes loved him so fiercely that it took a double chocolate coffee shake to quench the flame in her soul. There wasn't a day that Elsie didn't remember Harold her hero, Harold her shining knight charging to her rescue as police bullets peppered the campus, wounding six students and killing Harold's best friend Paul Laver.

A brave news photographer had photographed Elsie, keening and screaming while holding Paul's lifeless body in her arms, a photograph that wire services transmitted around the world and gave Elsie her one and only moment of worldwide recognition, a dubious fame that would haunt her for the rest of her life. A few months later, after she and Harold were married and settled in the small town thirty miles from the site of the campus, not a month passed without some student of a later generation appearing on their doorstep to pay homage to Saint Elsie. (For a while Harold called her Saint Elsie until he realized it was bad casting.)

At first these gestures flattered and pleased Elsie, but then she found herself offering cookies and refreshments like lemonade and limeade, and that was when Elsie began putting on weight. In the beginning her increase in size wasn't that noticeable. But then, five years later, when she thought at last she was pregnant, Dr. Irving told her no, she wasn't pregnant, she was just too fat and she'd better do something about that potbelly. She did. She bought tighter girdles.

Harold didn't seem to mind her expanding, at first. He charmingly referred to her as "pleasingly plump" for about five or six years, then found the French word *embonpoint* which also more or less

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meant plumpish or thereabouts, and then finally gave up with a shudder of revulsion when he realized she was now so fat that every time she laughed her eyes disappeared.

He began to spend more time at the bookstore (which he owned and ran, thanks to a small legacy from his deceased parents which included the ramshackle frame house he and Elsie shared), and Elsie took up the slack in her own life by learning to do her own baking. In time, her chocolate-chip toll house cookies à la Elsie became the talk of the town. At the frequent Church Bake-Ins her boxes of cookies were bid for as spiritedly as though they were Van Goghs or Renoirs. Elsie would stand to one side beaming with pride as she slowly and meticulously munched on a cookie from the private stock she always carried in a brown bag. Harold was not impressed.

Elsie nagged Harold about making improvements around the house. For example, she was afraid to use the small downstairs bathroom off the kitchen because the old-fashioned tank above the seat would leak heavily each time she pulled the chain. It was of course a huge effort for her to climb the stairs several times a day to use the toilet on the second landing. She once accused Harold of deliberately stalling on repairing the downstairs toilet because he thought climbing the stairs might reduce some of the ugly fat she carried. Harold thought nothing of the sort. That tank was hanging loose and dangerous, and it was just as well Elsie stayed out of that john.

She was kneading dough as she watched Harold sipping coffee. She cleared her throat and asked, "Do you want some eggs or something?"

"Nothing." The refusal sounded harsh and threatening. Elsie stared at his head bent over the coffee cup. He still had his lovely curly black hair although it was now becomingly peppered with gray. My God, she thought to herself, we're still young. We're still in our thirties. What happened? I was a heroine and he was my hero. We survived those terrible sixties and married and came here to live and work and build a good life together. Was it really my fault we couldn't have children? Just look at me—I'm fertile in every area but that one!

"Why the hell don't you want anything besides coffee?" she blurted out angrily, but more with frustration for feeling impotent in dealing with him. He pushed his cup and saucer to one side and got up. "You're going to meet her for a proper breakfast, is that it? Drive to some motel—"

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"Oh, shut up!" he shouted, half lifting his right hand as though to strike her. Only their eyes were locked in mute combat. The expression on her face was so lost and pathetic, he almost succumbed to crossing over to her and taking her in his arms. But she was bending over the dough, her fingers working like a masseuse's. "Elsie." She continued working. "I'll give you everything. The house, the car, the business, the savings. Let me go."

She drew herself up to her full height which wasn't much above five feet and said, "I'd sooner see you dead."

Fifteen minutes later Laura Branson emerged from the Boggs Motel and got into the car next to Harold. After shutting the door, they kissed, aware they were being watched by Mr. and Mrs. Boggs and several retirees who congregated on the motel's porch most mornings. Harold brazenly waved at his audience through the windshield and then drove away.

For about five minutes they drove in silence. Laura dwelled on that fateful day six weeks ago when she arrived in the village from Los Angeles to seek an interview with the legendary Elsie Crewes on the sixteenth anniversary of the campus tragedy. Laura was a television producer for a company specializing in documentaries one of which, "Where Are They Today?" was a top audience attraction every week. Viewers were asked to request a look at celebrities long out of the limelight, and that month there was a surprising amount of requests for an interview with Elsie. So here was Laura looking for Elsie, and as unkind fate would have it, she found her.

Elsie consented to a televised interview only in full closeup with absolutely no display of her obesity, and Laura, understanding and sympathetic, agreed. She wasn't blind to the look of gratitude on Harold's face either, although she later realized he was grateful at the sight of the slender, vivacious Laura.

The following week Laura returned with the camera crew and got her interview. She sensed then that all was not well with Elsie and Harold's marriage and the details were provided by Mrs. Boggs of the Boggs Motel. Then Laura visited Harold's bookstore and decided it too should be part of the interview inasmuch as it was Harold who had rescued Elsie from the police fire. This necessitated staying on for a few more days by which time she and Harold had fallen very much in love.

The following two weekends Laura and Harold met, they hoped discreetly, at a quiet motel suggested to Harold by one of his book salesmen. Traveling salesmen were supposed to be notorious for

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their knowledge of quiet and discreet motels. This salesman was a fraud and the lovers were seen by a friend of Mrs. Boggs and soon the sleepy village awakened with a stunning scandal all its own.

Harold was a careful driver and kept his eyes straight ahead. Laura turned and looked at him. "Harold, would you please pull over?"

"Is something wrong?"

"I have something to say to you and I don't want to say it while you're driving."

He pulled over and sat with his arm on the back of the seat. He had a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach because he knew what he was about to hear was going to be unpleasant. "Go ahead, sweetheart. I'm ready."

She patted his cheek gently, and then folded her hands in her lap. "I'm going back to Los Angeles on the twelve o'clock bus and I'm never coming back here again."

It was almost verbatim what he expected her to say except for the departure on the twelve o'clock bus. "Are you saying you never want to see me again?"

"Very reluctantly, believe me, but I can't go on with this sort of thing."

He thought for a moment and then said, "I'll leave her. I'll move to Los Angeles. The hell with Elsie and the hell with the divorce. What are we so old-fashioned about anyway? Hardly anybody gets married any more these days."

"My poor sweet Harold. She'll never let go of you. Don't you see? And how will you live? She'll get a smart lawyer and strip you of everything because of abandonment and then you'll start hating me."

"Never!"

"You snapped at me last night when I suggested the least you could do is fix that damned tank in the toilet."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap. I didn't mean to tell you about the tank. And I swear to God you had nothing to do with my estrangement from Elsie."

"I know."

"I swear it's true I haven't shared her bed in over six months! I mean I can still hear her shrieking, 'I never dreamed this bed would get too small for the two us!' and it wouldn't have if she'd have gone on a diet." He put his arms around Laura and hugged her tightly. "I stopped loving her a long time ago. I mean all you're responsible

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for is coming into my life and making up my mind to be rid of her at last. You're shivering."

She pulled away from him. "It's the way you said, getting rid of her at last."

"I meant getting away from her at last. You know what I mean! Ending this damned meaningless relationship once and for all! I'm tired of being married to a fat legend! I'm still young and I've got a right to some happiness. Please, Laura, please." He took her back in his arms and they kissed long and passionately and Laura knew then she could never give him up.

In the kitchen of Harold and Elsie's house, the fat woman opened the oven door and removed a hot tray of her celebrated cookies. Her neighbor, Rose Olson, sat at the table sipping coffee. Rose watched Elsie place the tray on a counter, then pick up a substitute tray and place that one in the oven.

"I don't know how you do it," said Rose.

"Do what?"

"Go on with your—your situation."

Elsie shut the oven door carefully. Annoyed as she was and tempted to slam the door for emphasis, she knew slamming the door might injure the texture of the cookies, and a true artist treated her creations with the respect due them. These were chocolate-chip toll house cookies à la Elsie, an accomplishment second only to her notoriety during the campus tragedy. She shuffled to the table and sat down across from Rose.

"What about my situation?"

Rose leaned forward. "Can I talk straight?"

"Go ahead. Shoot from the lip."

"When something's finished, it's finished. When I buried my Charlie, I didn't cry or tear my hair out. I said it's finished and that's that."

"Maybe you'll meet your Charlie in the afterlife."

"If there's an afterlife, he's remarried." She reached for a cookie and Elsie swiftly slapped her hand away. "Ouch! For crying out loud, I was only going to take *one!*"

"No, not those. They're for her."

A quizzical expression spread across Rose's face. "What do you mean . . . her."

"His girl friend, Laura. I'm going to bring them over to the Boggs Motel myself in person and make peace with her. I'm going to tell her I'm giving him a divorce and I'll only keep this here house. I

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don't want his rotten bookstore and he can even keep his savings." She lifted her chins bravely. "I'm going into the cookie business."

"Well, how about you! I'm real proud of you, Elsie." Rose lifted her coffee cup in a toast as Harold entered and slammed the screen door behind him.

Elsie yelped, "My cookies!" as she got up and waddled to the oven while Harold told her in no uncertain terms what to do with her cookies.

"Now, Harold," said Rose admonishingly.

Harold ignored his neighbor as he shouted at Elsie, "And now I'm going to fix that damned tank and let that be the end of it!" He knelt at a cupboard, flung open the doors, found his tool kit, kicked the doors shut, and disappeared into the bathroom. Elsie, finding the cookies in the oven still pristine and undamaged, made her way back to the table.

"Sorry about that," said Elsie.

"That's okay. He'll be nicer soon, once you tell him your good news. And Elsie honey, once you're rid of him, you go to one of those places that help you slim down and then come back to us as slim and pretty and feisty as your old revolutionary self. Oh, my, weren't we two of the prettiest young girls?"

"You're still not so bad," said Elsie, forced to raise her voice against the cacophony Harold was producing in the bathroom.

"Well," said Rosie as she swallowed her last gulp of coffee, "I know what you're going through. It's not easy losing the man you love. I mean with me, Charlie died and that was that. With you, you'll always know he's alive with her but what the hell, Elsie, I should imagine living with a man who doesn't love you is as bad as living with a corpse."

Elsie was staring at the plate of cookies intended for Laura. "I was once so clever, Rose. What happened to me?"

Rose thought for a moment and then sighed. "I suppose if you had recognized what happened, it wouldn't have happened. When you're ready, want me to drive you over to the motel? Maybe we can catch a movie afterwards. Might do us both good."

"What?" Elsie hadn't heard a word she'd said. Rose smiled and got up. "I got a house to clean. Why don't you yell out the window later and if you like"—she indicated the cookies with a sharp nod of her head—"I'll drive you over to the motel."

After Rose went out, Elsie sat down and stared at the door to the bathroom. Harold sounded very industrious . . .

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Laura Branson sat in the lobby of the Boggs Motel staring at the switchboard. She was waiting for Harold to call and tell her he'd be along soon to pick her up and drive her to Los Angeles. Mr. Boggs behind the desk looked at the wall clock and then spoke to Laura. "If you're going to catch that twelve o'clock bus, Miss Branson, you better get a move on. It comes through town real quick and only stops when you flag it down."

Laura smiled. She liked Boggs. She recognized in him the sort of human being who didn't care who was having an affair with whom so long as everybody was happy. "I'm not taking the bus after all." She dropped the next statement like a detonation. "Harold is driving me to Los Angeles." She crossed her legs, folded her arms, and leaned back contentedly. It was the first time she had spoken Harold's name aloud other than to Harold.

By the time Elsie had finished packaging the cookies baked for Laura and tying the box, Harold emerged from the bathroom carrying the tool kit.

"It's fixed."

Elsie turned to him. His hands were filthy. "You better wash up."

"I know that!" he snapped. He dropped the tool kit back into the cupboard, then went to the kitchen sink and ran the taps. Elsie bit her lower lip to keep from crying out that he was muddying her sink with the slime from the toilet tank. Instead, she opened the table drawer, found a crayon, and on the package of cookies neatly printed Laura Branson's name. Then she tossed the crayon back into the drawer, slammed the drawer shut, crossed to the oven, removed the fresh batch of cookies, shut off the oven, placed the cookies on a counter to cool, and went to the bathroom.

Harold was wiping his hands on a dish cloth as he watched Elsie enter the bathroom. He heard her latch it closed inside. He leaned against the kitchen sink and realized he was perspiring. He wiped his brow with the dish cloth, flung it to one side, and crossed to the table. He looked down at the package and read Laura's name. He was confused and perplexed. This package was for Laura? Undoubtedly it was cookies. Dear God, he realized, she's come to her senses! This is a peace offering to Laura! Elsie is setting me free!

"Elsie!" he shouted. "Elsie!"

But it was too late. She had pulled the chain which brought the tank down on her head, crushing her skull. Harold rattled the doorknob shouting Elsie's name repeatedly. As his voice rose, it soon

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brought Rose on the run from the clothesline where she had been beating a rug. She ran into the kitchen as Harold began banging on the door. "Elsie! Elsie speak to me!"

Harold's distress was contagious and Rose began screaming. "What's she doing in there? What's happening?" She joined Harold at the bathroom door. Harold began kicking at the door and soon a panel splintered. Harold pulled at the wood with his bare hands which were soon bleeding. Rose knelt and looked in and her screams brought other neighbors who helped Harold remove the door.

When Harold saw Elsie's crushed skull, his knees sagged and two neighbors standing behind him caught him and pulled him to a chair. Rose stared at the tank and thought to herself: Harold said he was going to fix this. She stared at Harold whose head hung down, while a neighbor knelt at each side of him, slapping his wrists.

A woman neighbor, a Mrs. Lewin, shook her head from side to side as another woman, Elvira Peake, who was a librarian and therefore a bit more efficient, phoned for an ambulance and the police. Rose was at the table reading Laura's name on the package as carefully crayoned by Elsie. She heard Mrs. Lewin behind her say, "What a tragedy. What an awful accident."

Rose turned to look at Harold. Then she sighed and said to Mrs. Lewin, "Yes, dear. It was a terrible accident. Yes, that's what we must tell the police when they get here."

Harold had his head under the cold water tap when the ambulance arrived followed by the police. He groped for the tap and turned it off as Rose handed him the dish cloth he had used earlier. As he wiped his face and then his hair, Rose said with a winning smile, "Such a terrible accident. And just when she had decided to give you your freedom. Did she tell you?"

"No." Rose could hardly hear him. "I—I guessed when I saw Laura's name on that package of cookies."

Elsie's corpse was now encased in a body bag. The ambulance attendants placed it on a portable stretcher and removed it from the house. One of the male neighbors said to another male neighbor in his most neighborly of voices, "I'll help Harold mend this here door. May be best to block the damned water closet up altogether."

Rose was still dwelling on the package of cookies. "She told me they were a peace offering for your girl friend." Harold was still bewildered and certainly somewhat frightened because one of the police officers was waiting to talk to him. Rose continued, "I guess

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those cookies are something of an epitaph for Elsie." Harold wasn't sure yet, but he thought there was menace in Rose's voice.

Harold said to the police officer, "Could you excuse me for a minute? I have to make an urgent phone call."

Rose was quick as a whip. "To Miss Branson? Why don't I do that for you, dear? You're so upset and you only need a few minutes with the police." She smiled at the officer. "He begged her to stop using that toilet because that tank was so shaky, but she was, well, not meaning to speak ill of the dead, too damned fat to climb the stairs to the bathroom there." Rose patted Harold's hand. "Now I'll call Miss Branson."

The officer was shaking his head with a mingling of sadness and sympathy. He said to Harold, "Women can be so damned contrary, can't they?"

"Yes, officer," said Harold who usually called him by his rightful name, Pete, when they went bowling together. "Women can be very contrary"—he was staring across the room at Rose who was presumably speaking to Laura at the motel—"and very troublesome." He turned to Pete. "Well, I guess that's that."

"Yeah," agreed Pete, "it sums up all accidental deaths—that's that."

Alone in the motel room Laura stood staring out the window trying to remember a line attributed to F. Scott Fitzgerald. Oh, yes. It came to her. "Show me a hero," Fitzgerald was reported to have said, "and I'll write you a tragic story." Harold was her hero and here she stood in the middle of his tragic story.

There was a knock on the door. She crossed to it and opened it. There stood Mr. Boggs with a somewhat mournful expression. "It's all over town by now. Would you like some coffee?"

"As a matter of fact, Harold's on his way over. We could use a pot, I think."

"Right away." He left her and she closed the door. She heard a car pulling into the drive and hurried to the window. Harold emerged from the car looking wan and grim. There was a woman with him, and she was carrying a package. She took Harold's arm somewhat possessively, thought Laura, and together they came up the gravel path toward the front porch.

There was a knock on the door and Laura hurried to open it. Mr. Boggs entered with a tray that held a jug of coffee, a pitcher of cream, a plate of sugar cubes, several saucers and matching cups.

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"I see Harold's got Rose Olson with him. She's their neighbor. I'll get another cup and saucer."

Harold and Rose appeared in the doorway. Mr. Boggs expressed his condolences to Harold who accepted them with a sigh, and Rose entered the room with a lavish smile as Boggs disappeared. Harold followed Rose into the room and quietly shut the door. Rose held out the package to Laura.

"For me?" asked Laura.

"Yes, dear," said Rose. "That's your name written on it, right?"

"Looks like it." Laura took the package and put it on the table next to the tray Boggs had brought.

Harold cleared his throat. "Laura, this is my neighbor, Rose Olson. She phoned you about Elsie. She . . . she's been very helpful."

"How kind of you, Mrs. Olson."

"Oh, you call me Rose!" Rose had settled into a chair next to the table.

Laura crossed over to Harold and kissed his cheek. "Are you all right?"

"I'm okay."

"Was it too bad with the police?"

Rose answered for Harold. "It was a piece of cake, honey! I explained it was an accident and why it was an accident and there was nothing to it. Harold's a free man. A widower. Is that coffee over there?"

Laura felt a chill settle over her. "Yes. Would you like some?" As she poured a cup of coffee for Rose, Harold sat on the edge of the bed. There was a quick tap on the door and Boggs hurried in with another cup and saucer, placed them on the table, and then hurried out. Harold got up and made sure the door was secured tightly. Laura filled the other cups and then wondered what to say.

"I'm planning on Wednesday for the funeral," said Harold to Laura. "You don't have to wait around."

"I really shouldn't. I must get back to my job."

Rose sipped some coffee and then said, "I'll make all the arrangements, Harold. You won't have to worry about a thing. Aren't you two having any coffee?"

Laura picked up her cup and saucer. Harold stood behind her, one hand resting gently on her shoulder. Although his touch was light, she felt a gentle squeeze that warned her there was trouble.

Rose said to Laura, "Of course now that Harold's planning to leave town for good, he's got no further use for that house of his, do you,

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Harold?" He shook his head. "Say, aren't you going to open the package? Those are Elsie's superduper chocolate-chip toll house cookies à la Elsie and they just melt in your mouth!" Harold found his pocket knife, pulled out a blade, and attacked the package. "So anyway," said Rose, "he's made me the most terrific offer about the house . . . and now it's mine."

Laura's eyes traveled from Rose's face to Rose's hand as she greedily selected a cookie from the package Harold held open for her. She bit into the cookie and munched contentedly.

Laura said to Harold, "That was very generous of you, Harold."

"Rose has been a good neighbor," said Harold.

"And a good neighbor is hard to find!" added Rose. "Of course I'm not afraid of ghosts either, not that I expect Elsie would come back to haunt a good friend like me. Anyway, she was a great believer in the afterlife, God rest her soul. I'll have to do something about that downstairs bathroom, though."

Rose looked at Laura and stuffed the rest of the cookie into her mouth. Through the food she said, "The way that tank fell, and crushed her skull." Laura's hands were clenched tightly together. Harold had told her of the way Elsie had kept whining about that faulty tank. Rose was greedily reaching for a second cookie. "Of course the house will take some repairing. That means money." She smiled at Harold. "You can help me there too, can't you, Harold?"

"Yes, I guess so."

Rose put her cup and saucer on the table, and lifted the package of cookies, proffering it to Laura. "Go on, try one. They're really great. You'll never taste the likes of these again once this box is polished off. Elsie took the secret of these cookies to her grave."

Laura found her voice. "No, thanks. Not right now."

"Your coffee's getting cold." Rose held her cup and saucer out to Laura. "Could you just tot mine up a bit, sweetie?"

Laura refilled the cup. Then she looked at Harold who was now leaning against the window. Show me a hero, she thought, and I'll write you a tragic story.

That's when the cup and saucer fell from Rose's hand. The coffee made an ugly stain on her dress and the cup cracked as it hit the floor. Laura leaped to her feet and Harold hurried to Laura's side as Rose clutched her stomach.

"Oh," she whispered, "oh, my!" She pitched forward and landed face down on the floor. Harold went to the door, opened it, and shouted for Boggs, who hurried into the room followed by his wife.

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"What happened?" asked Boggs as he knelt beside Rose and groped for her pulse.

"Well, she was gorging herself on Elsie's cookies and Laura just finished pouring her a second cup of coffee," explained Harold, "and then she whispered, oh, oh, my, and dropped the cup and saucer and then fell over on her face and oh, my God, look at the color of her skin!"

"I've seen that color before," gasped Laura, "when I did that documentary at the morgue. That's the color your skin turns when you've been poisoned!"

"Poisoned!" screeched Mrs. Boggs as she stared in horror at the chocolate-chip toll house cookies à la Elsie. Boggs had yelled out the hall to the switchboard operator to get the police and an ambulance.

Laura clutched at her bosom. "Oh, my God! That box of cookies was meant for *me!*" Harold drew her into his arms and she thought he murmured something under his breath but she couldn't be sure because Mrs. Boggs was continuing to make strange noises.

"Elsie Nelson wherever you are," screeched Mrs. Boggs, "you should be ashamed of yourself!" Then she said to Harold, "Well, I hate to say it, but it's a good thing she got killed today, because if this poor lamb"—indicating Laura who had promised recently to get her on a quiz show—"had been poisoned by these cookies, Elsie would have got life!"

Laura's head was buried on Harold's chest. The way her body shook, he thought she was sobbing bitterly and he patted her back tenderly while wondering what good fairy was looking after his well being. It wasn't until their honeymoon in Acapulco that she told him she was suppressing hysterical laughter. Laura never ate cookies or candies or ice cream or anything calorically dangerous. She explained to Harold, "Wait until you meet the rest of my family! That's why I have to be so careful! They are *obese!*"

"Q"

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

NEW SERIES CHARACTERS: It's only in retrospect that a new series detective is born with the first book in that series. From an author's point of view it's the second book that really establishes an addition to the ranks of series detectives. Thus Ed McBain's Florida lawyer Matthew Hope becomes a series character this month with the publication of *Rumpelstiltskin* by Viking Press, though McBain didn't plan him as such when he wrote *Goldilocks,* the first Hope novel, in 1976. Conversely, McBain's Benjamin Smoke was planned as a series detective but never made it past one book, 1975's *Where There's Smoke.*

P. D. James has stated that her next novel may be about female private detective Cordelia Gray, who starred in *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972). If so, she too will join the ranks of memorable series sleuths.

SKULLDUGGERY: The semi-professional mystery magazine *Skullduggery* acquired new owners earlier this year—the Boston partnership of Karen Shapiro, William H. Desmond, and Will Murray. Subtitled "The Magazine of Fiction Noir," the Winter 1981 issue reflects a new editorial policy of publishing primarily stories in the mood of Chandler and James M. Cain, and includes a classic reprint by Richard Sale. Subscription is $10.00 a year for four issues, from Skullduggery, Box 191, MIT Branch Station, Cambridge, MA 02139. (*Skullduggery* was founded by Michael L. Cook, who has moved on to other projects as reported below.)

CRIME WRITERS CONGRESS: At about the time you're reading this several hundred mystery writers from all parts of the world will gather in Stockholm, Sweden, for the Third International Congress of Crime Writers (June 15 to 19). Following the success of previous gatherings in London (1975) and New York (1978), this year's Congress is expected to attract authors from several smaller nations to meet with members of the Mystery Writers of America, the Crime Writers Association of Britain, and organizations of Swedish and French writers.

GARDNER SHORT STORIES: Following publication by Davis and Dial Press of Erle Stanley Gardner's *The Amazing Adventures of Lester*

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Leith, edited by Ellery Queen, there seems to be renewed interest in Gardner's forgotten pulp stories, numbering in the hundreds. Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg have collected seven Gardner science-fiction novelets from *Argosy* in *The Human Zero,* and will follow it this month with *Whispering Sands,* a selection of Gardner's western stories, both published by Morrow.

MORE SHERLOCKIANA: Readers of Ronald Burt De Waal's mammoth 1978 volume, *The World Bibliography of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson,* will want to know that a companion volume, *The International Sherlock Holmes,* is now available from Archon Books, The Shoe String Press, Hamden, CT 06514. The new bibliography classifies and annotates more than 6,000 items of Sherlockiana which appeared between 1972 and 1978, and includes many pre-1972 items discovered since publication of the first book.

MYSTERY BOOKSHOP: The newest mystery bookshop to come to our attention is Sherlock's Home, 5614 E. Second Street, Long Beach, CA. The inside is designed as a Victorian parlor, with fireplace, window seat, and a window complete with bats and the continuous sounds of a thunderstorm. The store is owned and operated by Beth Caswell, and carries a full range of mystery hardbounds and paperbacks as well as movie posters and other mystery memorabilia.

CHANDLER: Frederick Unger continues its welcome "Recognitions" series with *Raymond Chandler* by Jerry Speir ($5.95 paper, $10.95 cloth), a fine in-depth study of all Chandler's novels and short stories, together with a brief account of his life.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Readers of the old pulp magazines might remember that some of Lawrence Treat's earliest appearances in print were a series of puzzle features called "Detectograms," published in the mid-1930s in *Ace-High Detective* and other magazines. Now Treat has written a new series of 24 mystery puzzles, to be published in September as *Crime and Puzzlement.* The illustrated trade paperback is coming from David R. Godine, the Boston publisher who last fall gave us a handsome new edition of H. G. Wells's *The Door in the Wall.*

Michael L. Cook is in the midst of a truly massive project—the first comprehensive composite checklist of all digest-size mystery magazines and their contents. Titled *Monthly Murders,* the book will cover both American and British magazines and is expected to be more than 600 pages long. It'll be published in hardcover by Greenwood Press. We'll have further details when a publication date is set.

The latest from Penguin Crime Monthly paperbacks: Edmund Crispin's *Beware of the Trains* (June), Jane Langton's *Dark Nantucket Moon* (July), and Michael Gilbert's *The Killing of Katie Steelstock* (August). Eric Ambler's first new book in four years, *The Care of Time,* was published in England in May. A U.S. edition is expected this fall. Stephen King's new horror novel *Cujo* will be published by Viking this fall.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

"If it was just *us*—you and me," the blonde whispers to the man in her arms. "I'm tired of what's right and wrong." Then she suggests they kill her husband, and the two lovers take the next step towards doom. We know doom is the eventual fate for Jack Nicholson and Jessica Lange from the very opening of *The Postman Always Rings Twice*—the heavy strings of the dour opening music and the titles etched in solid black all point to the downhill road this film will take—a close, pessimistic adaptation of James M. Cain's celebrated crime novel which was, in 1946, the basis for a classic example of film *noir*.

Indeed, the earlier *Postman*—starring John Garfield and Lana Turner—was a film of such impact that many felt a remake would be ill-advised. Not so, says the producer-director of the current version, Bob Rafelson, who feels it is not a remake at all but a fresh stab at the source, an adaptation which for the first time catches the smoldering passion of the book. The unauthorized and suppressed 1942 adaptation by Luchino Visconti, *Ossessione*, "Italianized" (Rafelson's word) the obsessive affair yet somewhat missed the sense of enveloping doom.

Previously, in 1939, Cain had sold the rights to his book to a French film producer—no one in Hollywood would dare touch it—and the result was enticingly called *Le Dernier Tournant* (*The Last Turn*, as in turn of the road); the film has never been shown in this country. Although *Postman* was a huge bestseller (published in 1934), for more than a decade the sharp vigilance of Hollywood's Production Code was such that the book was thought unfilmable.

Then Cain attained visibility in the film capital—first with *Double Indemnity* (1944), brilliantly structured by director Billy Wilder and screenwriter Raymond Chandler from a similar plot: a married woman and her lover scheme to dispose of her husband. The following year, *Mildred Pierce* was discovered as the film began over the body of her worthless spouse. Both highly successful movies were based on books written by Cain after *Postman*; it was now certainly time, as Hollywood moved into a postwar period of naturalistic crime dramas, to squeeze *Postman* by the censors.

The problem with *Postman* was that explicit, consuming passion between two ordinary people sparked the murder; in 1946 M-G-M skirted this tension so obliquely that we were never sure the two lovers did no more than long for one another and swim together in the dark, dangerous ocean nearby. Cain recalled later that even the M-G-M producer felt the film puzzling, that "the central part"—the relationship between Garfield and Turner—was "fuzzy and shaky and squashy." The violence of the book was only hinted at when Garfield snarled, "Give me a kiss or I'll sock ya." Throughout, though, Lana Turner wore white, was a

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woman trapped, driven, and confused. She saw in Garfield the chance to get away from a dreary, futureless life at a roadside diner with an older husband—in this film not (as in the book) an arrogant Greek immigrant but a cheerful, paternal Englishman, Cecil Kellaway. Though the casting of the husband robbed the film of much of its earthy motivation, Turner herself was excellent opposite Garfield, suggesting passion with the clarity of a lipstick smear.

The new version is of course much more uncompromising in its depiction of this fatal union; more importantly, it sets the story back where it belongs, the Depression, which the 1946 film ignored in order to make the events more "contemporary." Here, when the lovers first decide to run away together they become aware of the harsh realities of life in town—soup lines, vagrant shacks, drifters curled up in bus depots and street corners. They are driven back to the diner and their alternative solution: murder. It is a world of discontent, a world Nick the husband decries as having "opportunity, but no happiness"—which describes all three principals of the drama.

Jack Nicholson is the main character; his first film was *Cry Baby Killer* (1958) and he has since often starred in thrillers, including *Chinatown* and last year's *The Shining*. As the wife, Jessica Lange—known previously only as the heroine of the flawed remake of *King Kong* and the angel of death in *All That Jazz*—displays a dazzling range. If this *Postman* succeeds as a drama of real-seeming people pulled down by a fate they themselves trigger, it is because of her acting and the splendidly moody photography.

The film *looks* right, and the Depression times are accurately depicted right down to the roadside signs for Moxie soda and old radio shows. Gas is 16¢ a gallon. The script—by David Mamet, who in good stage plays like *The Water Machine* and *American Buffalo* has dealt with aspects of crime—is unswervingly close to Cain. But the final chapter to the book is missing, so the film ends terribly abruptly. One misses the first-person narration of the earlier film—Garfield in confession, sorting out his soul to a priest—which makes that version despite its restraints and gloss come closer to illuminating his dark torment. Because the scene is scrapped, the explanation of the title is also dropped; we no longer hear the hero say the postman always comes back a second time.

These days one is lucky if the postman turns up at all, and although this well intentioned version arrives first-class, in the end it loses zip.

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"Q"

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INTERVIEW: JACK RITCHIE (2)

This is the conclusion of an interview that began in the previous issue.

EQMN: Have any of the places you've lived in had any effect on your writing?

RITCHIE: As far as my subject matter is concerned, my surroundings have very little bearing. However, with regard to my personal well being, they make a big difference. I like country and the farther out the better.

When I married, my wife and I moved to Washington Island. It's at the thumb-tip of the Wisconsin "mitten" and approximately 26 square miles in area. So is Manhattan. Washington Island now has a permanent population of about 450. And Manhattan? Nearly two million, I guess. We spent the first 2½ years in a log cabin. A *genuine* log cabin. None of your fancy inside paneling or running water, but plain old peeled Lincoln logs between you and mother nature. We used most of our free time to pound the chinking (oakum) back into the spaces between the logs and discovered that trying to heat a log cabin with just a fireplace when the temperature drops below freezing is impossible. We had to get an oil stove and we spent our Januarys and Februarys within six feet of the thing, praying it wouldn't go out. Once we were snowed in for ten days. It was my kind of place and I loved it.

But with pregnancy making its appearance, we were forced to move to a regular two-story frame house and acquire a mortgage. Four acres, half of it wooded, for $7,400. *Those* were the days. However, the population of the island steadily declined and that affected the school system, so we departed and rented a farmhouse near Jefferson. It wasn't Washington Island, but I liked it and so did the kids. But eventually we had to move again and today I sit in an apartment in a small town. Where next, I don't know.

EQMN: You have two sons and two daughters. Is either of the boys named John?

RITCHIE: When I was still a teenager I got into a card game with a group of my friends. During the course of the game it suddenly occurred to me that five of the six of us were named John. The sixth was a George, but his middle name was John. I decided then and there that there were just too many Johns in the world and I wasn't going to contribute any more. Therefore I have Christopher and Steven. Our daughters Jennifer and Jessica were never in any real danger.

EQMN: You said of your cover photograph (*EQMM*, 1/28/81), taken by your son Christopher, "How time inflicts. I look a bit like a tired James Jones, and we don't write alike at all." Was your World War II experience anything like that of Jones?

RITCHIE: As far as that's concerned, Jones and I had very little in common except that we were both in the same army. I think. I was, however, once quartered for three weeks in the famous Quadrangle at Schofield Barracks. I might actually have walked on the same marble floors that Jones did. Gone to the same mess hall. The same latrine. We'll never know.

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I spent 3½ years in the army, two in the Central Pacific, mostly on small islands, counting the days. I'd rather forget than remember. However, it was on the island of Kwajalein that I read my first detective novel. Kwajalein, at that time, was a no-beer, no-women, no-trees, no-nothing kind of place and I was stuck there for eleven months. There wasn't much to do but read and pray to get shipped out. Anywhere. Our company received a shipment of Armed Forces Library books, about two hundred of them. I read about 160 of the books and then there was nothing left but the mysteries.

At that time I was sort of an Edmund Wilson snob about the mystery novel, but worse. I hadn't read one of them in my entire life. So there I was, desperate, and I finally succumbed and opened one of the mysteries. I was hooked. Addicted. So much so that to this day I very seldom read "straight" novels any more.

I have never used the war as a background for any of my stories, with one exception, "Chicken Charley." I forget where it appeared, except that the magazine changed editors after it was accepted. I hope it wasn't my fault.

EQMN: Unlike many writers of humor you're very congenial. Have you any idea what might cause some other funny writers to be dour face to face?

RITCHIE: I suspect that the basic trouble with writers of humor is that nobody takes them seriously. People seem to feel that writing humor is one grand easy ball and that if you really settled down and got serious you might amount to something someday. They could be right. I may be humorous and congenial in public, but when nobody's looking or listening I do my share of sighing.

EQMN: In his Introduction to your story collection, *A New Leaf and Other Stories* (Dell, 1971), another very funny and congenial writer, Donald E. Westlake, wrote: "Jack Ritchie happens to be a brilliant man in the wrong pew, a miniaturist in an age of elephantiasis. He knows, maybe better than anybody else currently at work in the area, that a short story needs emphasis on both words—it should be a story and it should also be short . . . [He has a] skill at economy that just can't be described economically."

RITCHIE: The short story seems to be my field, possibly by forfeit. I've always felt that there hasn't been a novel published that couldn't be reduced to a better short story. Often the very long novels are really collections of short stories and sometimes they even include what are basically articles. Victor Hugo was good at that. He put about 30,000 words into *Les Miserables* delineating the history, structure, and whatnot of the Paris sewers. Now if I'd been in his shoes I could have described the sewers in two paragraphs. Maybe one. *Les Miserables* itself would have become a novelet. Possibly even a pamphlet.

Which reminds me of my shortest short story. I had to insert it into another short story, otherwise it might have gotten lost in the cracks. Here goes . . . "When it was all over, only two people remained on the face of the earth. After twenty years, the older man died."

Sort of grips me, but looking at it now I think I can still cut it a little.

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THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

The use of pseudonyms has long been widespread in the field of mystery and detective fiction. Not surprisingly, in a type of fiction so often concerned with discovering who done it, many readers are eager to find out the real perpetrators behind the names on the books. Though the identities of some mystery-writing bylines began as secrets, few of them have remained secrets for long, at least among those who really wanted to know. At least four of the authors of the novels reviewed below are also known under other names. Three of them can be unmasked through the copyright page or standard reference sources. On the fourth, some guesswork is necessary.

*** Amanda Cross: *Death in a Tenured Position,* Dutton, $10.50. The first woman English professor at Harvard is the object of dirty tricks and worse in the latest from Dorothy L. Sayers' most prominent descendant in the field of the academic feminist mystery. Professor Kate Fansler investigates and (as is the trend with women detectives) her husband is far from the scene. The writing is witty, the clueing fair (if you are a graduate student in English literature), and the solution, of a type hard to bring off successfully, ultimately satisfying. Cross chooses some of the best epigraphs in detective fiction. It has been known for some time that Cross is really Carolyn Heilbrun, a distinguished Columbia University scholar, among whose subjects, unsurprisingly, is Sayers.

*** Patrick Mann: *Steal Big,* St. Martin's, $9.95. Novelist Max Patrick, a former Intelligence agent who draws on real-life intrigues for his fiction and likes to keep his hand in when a big caper presents itself, narrates this fast-moving thriller in fine style. It's all kind of unbelievable, but then so was James Bond. Mann has also written crime fiction as Leslie Waller.

** Hamilton T. Caine: *Carpenter, Detective,* Ace/Charter, $2.50. A new L.A. private eye goes through all the usual paces, including getting hit over the head and filling us in on his dreams. There are some nice stylistic touches and character vignettes along the way, but the tangled plot denies the reader the satisfaction of a single culprit. Caine is the *nom de plume* of *Mystery* magazine publisher, Stephen L. Smoke.

*** John Domatilla: *The Last Crime,* Atheneum, $8.95. This novel of a dystopian future England is less a crime-suspense story than its packaging would indicate, though its characters plan a big caper of sorts: destroying the memory of the master computer and thus liberating the mind-controlled populace. The attempt to create future slang, jargon, and speaking and writing styles is sometimes more irritating than dazzling, but there is some very impressive writing toward the end. The method the protagonist uses to get the computer to erase his records is an ingenious one. The jacket says Domatilla is the pseudonym of the author of five novels. The pointed

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satire, the use of both British and midwestern American settings, and the interweaving of mystery and s.f. elements lead me to suspect John Sladek, author of the Carrlike Thackeray Phin mysteries. But that is merely a guess.

*** Anne Perry: *Paragon Walk,* St. Martin's, $9.95. Once again Charlotte Pitt aids her policeman-husband Thomas in solving a murder in the claustrophobic atmosphere of Victorian London society. An excellent funeral scene highlights this effective novel of detection and social observation.

*** John Ball: *Trouble for Tallon,* Doubleday/Crime Club, $9.95. In *Police Chief,* former Pasadena cop Jack Tallon whipped his Whitewater, Washington, force into shape, and they perform flawlessly in their second case. It involves the murder of a city councilman who (prior to expiring) accuses members of a yoga community he had tried to run out of town.

This one has everything you expect of Ball: sound police work, fairly laid clues, exciting action scenes, and a high standard of proper human behavior.

** Gavin Scott: *A Flight of Lies,* St. Martin's, $9.95. Like the shoot-'em-up western, the pure action spy spoof seems to work better as a movie than as a novel. Despite its documentary format, utilizing memos, interviews, and so forth, this British entry is a very physical story that seems to cry out for screen adaptation. There are some funny bits, and hero Ronald Foster may make a series character as a quixotic amateur spy.

** Sara Woods: *Weep for Her,* St. Martin's, $9.95. Some series offer a consistent, reliable product, while others vary widely in quality. The Antony Maitland series is in the latter category, and this is one of the London barrister's low points. The tale begins well—with a damage suit against a medium accused of precipitating a suicide—but soon bogs down badly. To add to the disappointment, the usual trial scene is missing.

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"Q"

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a *NEW* detective story by

HENRY T. PARRY

To prove his innocence, MacCrae had to become a detective, and to become a detective, MacCrae had to go to unusual investigative lengths to learn the truth, the final truth . . .

THE FINAL SECRET

by HENRY T. PARRY

Tom MacCrae stopped the car on the last ridge above Weston and looked down on the town. Home again, he thought sardonically. But how could it ever be home? He had no family left here, his house was gone, his business gone, and if he should meet former friends on the street it would be an embarrassment on both sides. He knew why he had received a comparatively light sentence, eight years, which the parole board had reduced to five. His father-in-law, the golfing companion and former law partner of the trial judge, had seen to that, a last act of family obligation, as if whatever it cost in past favors cashed-in, it was cheap if it got his daughter and grandsons away from his son-in-law.

MacCrae could see the white spire of the church where he had been married, the Civil War monument, the rotting train station, and the squat gray bank building where it had all started. The testimony of Alfred Meadows, the sunken-cheeked, hound-eyed bank guard came back to him.

"Now, Mr. Meadow," the district attorney had said, "will you please tell the jury in your own words—"

"Meadows, the name is. Not Meadow." A remonstrative nasal impatience marked his voice. "All my life people keep calling—"

"Sorry, Mr. Meadows. Now if you will please tell the jury what happened in the bank that morning."

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"Like I said before, when I heard this sharp crack I run down the steps to the safe-deposit room and there was Tom MacCrae with a gun in his hand bending over Dr. Devoe."

"No, start back at the beginning."

"Well, I checked into the bank at eight o'clock sharp on Monday morning—I'm always the first one in—and I did this and that until it was time to open."

"Did you go down to the safe-deposit room?"

"Why, sure, I do that every morning to see that everything is in order in those little booths we got down there—change the date on the calendars, see that there are deposit slips on the writing shelves in the booths, turn on the dehumidifier, things like that."

"Was there anyone in that room? In any of the booths?"

"How could there be? Like I said, I'm the first one in."

"Will you describe the room where the safe-deposit boxes are kept?"

"It's a room that was added to the back of the bank a long time ago. You go down these four steps. The vault is down there on the right. On the left is a row of six booths with these little shutter-type doors where they can go in once I give them their box out of the vault. But first they got to sign this card at the top of the steps."

"Is there any other way in or out except by these four steps? Back door? Window? Skylight?"

"No, there ain't. And to get their safe-deposit box they have to have me go with them into the vault with the bank's key to their box."

"So nobody could get into that room without your seeing them? There's no other way in or out?"

"No." Meadows combined a sigh with an exasperated whine.

"Now, will you tell the jury what happened when the bank opened for business?"

"Well, the first customer was at 9:05, right after we opened. It was Dr. Devoe. He was always the first customer every Monday. You could set your watch by him."

"And then?"

"I had him sign the card. Then I went down with him and we got his box out of the vault and he went into the booth and closed the door. Number One, it was. He always used Number One because it was the biggest. Then about 9:15 Tom MacCrae comes in. We get his safe-deposit box out and I put him in Number Six. Dr. Devoe was still in Number One. I go back up to the bank floor and sit down

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at the top of the steps. About ten minutes later I hear this sharp crack. It must have took me maybe half a minute to figure out where it came from. I run down there and see Dr. Devoe lying on the floor of the Number One booth, with Tom MacCrae bending over him with a gun in his hand. There was money all over the floor. MacCrae looks up and points the gun at me and I thought he was going to shoot me too but—"

When the objection had been sustained, Meadows went on.

"MacCrae told me to get upstairs and call the police. He came up with me and called the ambulance. Then he told me to stay at the head of the steps and not let anyone down there until the cops and the ambulance arrived."

"So there was nobody in that room before the shooting but MacCrae and Dr. Devoe? And you didn't let anyone down there until help arrived?"

"That's right."

Calling witness after witness, the prosecutor proceeded step by step to elicit testimony showing the motive MacCrae had in shooting James Devoe. Dr. Devoe, who had given up the practice of medicine years before, had financed MacCrae Enterprises in a real-estate venture involving the construction of thirty-five houses, to be designed and built by MacCrae. A series of mishaps had occurred on the project. Two houses had been destroyed by fire. An unusually cold winter had delayed work, and a strike had made building materials difficult to obtain.

Sensing that he was caught in a hard-luck venture, Dr. Devoe had foreclosed on the completed houses in order to cover his loan. MacCrae not only had lost the money he had put in but had worked eighteen months for nothing. It was all legal and aboveboard. Whatever the members of the jury may have thought about the fairness of the transaction, or of the fact that the gun could not be traced to MacCrae, they brought in a verdict of guilty on the grounds that nobody else could have shot Devoe . . .

As MacCrae sat in the car looking down on the town, he remembered that morning in the safe-deposit room, with Devoe lying dead, clutching his safe-deposit box, a gesture symbolic of how he had lived. But what had shed a new light on the gray bottom-line soul of James Devoe was the picture that lay among the scattered bills, a picture in a thin oval of gold, with its glass shattered. It showed a gentle-faced girl, with large trusting eyes, a face that would seem

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to awaken instinctively a desire to protect from the harsh realities, to cherish, and even perhaps to tease playfully.

At least, that was how MacCrae, in retrospect, analyzed his reaction. The style of her coiffure was, he guessed, that of some twenty years before. The delicate feminine face offered a humane counterpoint to the crisp litter of money in which it lay. Whoever she was, a younger sister, a lost love, she seemed an alien and unlikely figure in the life of the arid, calculating Devoe.

The town was submerging into the shadow of the ridge as he started down into the valley. He had the impulse to switch off the engine and coast silently into Weston like a hawk, but he reminded himself that buzzards swoop silently and so do vultures. He left the engine on. He would check into the motel outside of town and make no effort to conceal the fact of his return. But he would stay only long enough to kill the person who had committed the crime for which he had done time. Whoever that person was.

"I haven't any idea where to start, Gerry."

As he sat opposite Gerald Callender in the bank's office, MacCrae thought that this man did not conform to the stereotype of the small-town banker. Callender was the fourth of his family to run the bank, a trim rosy man who to MacCrae's knowledge had paid the college bills of two dozen of Weston's young people without collateral or request for repayment. When MacCrae's own money ran out, Callender had given him what he needed to pay his defense lawyers. In his leisure time, of which he allowed himself a liberal amount, Callender engaged in white-water canoeing and in cave exploration, both of which would have seemed beyond the capacity of most sixty-five-year-old men. As he talked to MacCrae, Callender toyed with a desk motto which read: *In speluncae Paradisio est*, a sentiment that MacCrae could not subscribe to.

There had been no embarrassment when the two men met, Callender treating MacCrae's absence as he would if MacCrae had been away building houses in some distant state. MacCrae for his part did not intend to let his time in prison stand between him and the people he valued. There was only one person to whom he would ever voluntarily mention his prison sentence, and he had grimly resolved that the conversation would be short.

"I don't know what to suggest, Tom," Callender said. "Where are there any likely suspects? True, Devoe wasn't liked. In fact, there were a couple of people who hated him, but that doesn't mean they

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killed him. And they had you dead to rights. Even you don't contend there was somebody else in that safe-deposit room."

"Is it possible that Devoe had any criminal connections?"

"Not that I know of. But you know as well as I do that this town is full of secrets. I never saw a more secretive man. What's the expression? He wouldn't tell you if your coat was on fire. I hated to deal with him. I used to wish he had stuck to medicine. In some other town, of course."

"I felt the same way," MacCrae said. "I always felt that he had some hidden advantage."

"He did," said Callender wryly. "Unmatched, unrestrained, naked greed. He was a small loss."

"I should have continued my financing with you, Gerry, but no point in going into that now. I was stupid."

"Not stupid. Just like other people who've dealt with Devoe. Just like me. At one time Devoe cost me—cost the bank—a lot of money. Let's not discuss it. I don't want people to know how I got taken. Have you seen Alice's exhibit out there on the floor?"

MacCrae was in no mood to look at pictures, but he followed Callender out of his office to the bank lobby where several dozen water colors by Callender's wife were on exhibit. "Wildflowers Around Weston," a placard announced. He followed Callender dutifully from picture to picture until one caught his eye, "Marsh Marigolds On Glover's Run," not because of the flowers but because he had never heard of Glover's Run.

"Where's Glover's Run?"

"About fifty feet from where you're standing right now," Callender replied.

When MacCrae looked at him questioningly, Callender led him back to his office and took out a sheaf of U.S. Geodetic Survey maps.

"I got these for my canoeing. Trouble is, they show streams that aren't more than a foot wide. Now look here at this blue line. That's Glover's Run, a little creek"—Callender gave it the local pronunciation "crick"—that comes down out of the mountain and runs right through the old section of Weston, parallel to and between Main Street and First. Somewhere behind us here and behind the other businesses on Main Street."

"There isn't any stream running through Weston—at least, I never saw any."

"You can't see it but it's there. About out here, where the town line is, Glover's Run goes under the road in a culvert, but it doesn't

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come out on the other side. My old man told me that about fifty or sixty years ago the town put the stream in a forty-eight-inch-high concrete pipe. That meant they could then fill in the gully it had made. This permitted the businesses here on Main Street, if they wanted, to build out backward over the fill."

But MacCrae could summon little patience to listen to his friend's account of town improvements made half a century ago. He reverted to the topic that had brought him back to town.

"That day when I found Devoe, he had that safe-deposit box clutched to his chest as if he was trying to take it with him. There was a lot of money scattered about the floor. And there was something else, something I've thought and thought about ever since."

"What are you talking about?"

"There was a picture of a young woman, an appealing young woman, not somebody who would have been mixed up with a cold fish like Devoe. On it was written: *Love, Angela.*"

Callender sighed, a long deep exhalation, and looked at the gold letters on the bank's window.

"Talk about secrets, there was one. That picture was of Devoe's first wife, Angela. Angela Edwards, a local girl. Family's been around here longer than the Callenders. She was a beautiful girl. Oh, there were stories going around at the time, mostly because nobody liked Devoe. But I doubt if anybody will ever know the truth."

"Truth about what?"

"About how she died. Look, all this happened long before you came to Weston. Normally, if I thought it would be useful, I'd suggest you talk to Roy and Helen Edwards—they're Angela's older brother and sister—but I don't think they'd tell you anything, even now. Helen was our chief teller here in the bank until she retired, oh, six-seven years ago."

"Is there anyone else? Remember, I've got nothing to go on."

"There is one other person. She never said much about it at the time, which everybody said showed uncharacteristic reticence. Old Miss Parsons. She was Angela Devoe's nurse. Whether she'd talk, I don't know."

Old Miss Parsons was willing, and it seemed to MacCrae, more than willing to talk. In her tiny living room where every window was obscured by pots of hanging geraniums and where an indignant Persian cat had to be rousted from the chair MacCrae had been

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invited to use, she held forth with a vehemence that made MacCrae suspect that she had been prevented for years from the kind of full discussion she thought the death of Angela Devoe merited.

As she talked, she jabbed and twisted at her knitting with punishing strokes, never raising her eyes, as though to avoid distraction from her narrative. Her hair, jet-black in spite of her age, was in two long braids, and her skin was the color of the inside of a much-used teapot, making her look, MacCrae thought, like an Indian Madame LaFarge.

"He let Angela die. I don't care what anyone says. He let Angela die. That night, when I left the house, he had just come in. Dr. Devoe, I said, I don't like the symptoms she's developing. He hardly listened to me, just said something about pregnant women having all kinds of silly notions. Then he went into his office and closed the door."

"What did you do?"

"What could I do? That's what I want to know. What could I do? Here's her husband, a medical doctor, and he pays no attention to what's happening to the girl. And me, only a nurse, a practical nurse, not an R.N."

Miss Parsons stopped, as if she were rearranging a well-worn defense. The needles clicked steadily on.

"She should have been packed off to the hospital. But not him. I don't think he even went up to look at her."

"But why did she die?"

"Neglect, that's why. Neglect on the part of the money-grubbing Dr. James Devoe. Or was a doctor until he gave it up and spent all his time putting his money into investments. Angela went into a coma that night. When I came in the next morning, I found her. Dead. Eclampsia they said."

"I suppose everybody knew of his lack of attention?"

"No they didn't. Dr. Devoe said if I talked about it he'd sue me and I'd lose this house and then he'd see to it that I never got another nursing job. But I did tell two people."

The old lady smiled grimly. MacCrae waited, his eyes on the twitching mass of wool suspended from Miss Parsons' needles.

"I told Roy and Helen Edwards. The Edwardses lost their parents when they were pretty young and so they kind of raised each other. Angela was the youngest and the pet. Everybody's pet, come to think of it. But in cases like this, what can you prove?"

"Where would I find Roy and Helen Edwards?"

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"Out there on the Ridge Road, just outside of town. You can tell the house because Roy's got this sign out on the front grass. Property surveys, it says. They're both retired now."

"I could tell you plenty about Dr. Devoe's second wife too," Miss Parsons went on. "Out there in that gloomy old house all by herself, drinking herself to death on the booze that Henny Fritchey, the oil man, delivers."

MacCrae rose to go. "I want to thank you for your help, Miss Parsons."

"Glad to do it. When Gerry Callender called from the bank to say you were coming, he said you went to jail for shooting Dr. Devoe. Let me tell you I'm real pleased to meet the man who did it."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, Miss Parsons, but I didn't do it."

"Oh, sure, you got to say that, but let me tell you, sonny, you did this town a big favor."

She drove her steel knitting needle through the heart of the wool.

The weathered sign on the front lawn read: *Roy Edwards—Properties Surveyed.* The woman who answered MacCrae's knock also looked weathered, a woman in her early sixties, tanned, white-haired, lean, with an aquiline, immobile face, dressed in slacks and a man's shirt from the pocket of which protruded green, plastic-covered wires of the type used to tie up plants. Her glasses magnified her eyes, giving an owlish bird-of-prey aspect to her scrutiny of him. MacCrae felt that she knew all about him even before he told her who he was and what he wanted.

"Roy's in the back. Come with me, please."

MacCrae followed her through the house to an enclosed sunporch in the rear, a room that looked out over rows of neatly staked plants, vegetables on one side, flowers on the other. Rolls of faded work-prints stood in an umbrella stand next to a drafting table to which was clamped a lamp vaguely resembling a praying mantis. Propped here and there against the furniture, as though for ready reference, were framed maps and prints of the old section of the town.

At the end of the porch a man performed handstands on parallel bars, his slender body rising in slow control, his white hair falling forward. When MacCrae entered, the performer raised his head, scanning MacCrae, and shoulder-rolled off the bars, landing lightly, his feet not moving from the spot where they initially struck the floor.

"Not bad for seventy, eh?"

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Roy Edwards' appearance spoke of the construction-site trailer. Tan trousers, tan shirt, ankle-high laced shoes of the type known as engineering. His steel-rimmed glasses lodged just above the sharp angle of his nose; his faded blue eyes gleamed with a hard down-to-earth intelligence. Shorter than MacCrae by several inches, his erect, vigilant posture made MacCrae think of a simple but indispensable tool, well-honed and well-used. These two, he thought, would be an effective team. For the first time, and without good reason, he felt encouraged.

"As I indicated to Miss Edwards, I hoped that the two of you would talk to me about Dr. Devoe."

Edwards looked at him intently before he answered in a patient, slow voice.

"Well, I don't see what we could tell you, Mr. MacCrae, that you don't already know. I understand that he was your financial backer, so it seems to me that—"

"I meant before that. The time when your sister Angela died."

Edwards reluctantly waved him to a chair and perched himself on the drafting stool. Helen Edwards remained standing, her back to the garden windows, her enlarged eyes fixed on MacCrae, her fingers twisting and untwisting a green plant tie. Her silence was not that of one who stands aside and waits for another to lead, he thought, but rather the attitude of a partner who knows what is going to be said. She reminded MacCrae of the M.P.'s he had tangled with in the army, the one who stood silent while his partner asked the questions.

"It's been years now since Angela left us," Edwards said. "And it still disturbs us to talk about it, to be reminded of those days."

"I'm sorry to do it, Mr. Edwards, but wasn't it true that her death might have been prevented? That she died of neglect?"

"What's the point of bringing it all up now? While we shall never forget her, we can't spend our lives dwelling on what's past. We're busy people, Helen and I, and we've got to get on with our lives."

"But do you feel that Dr. Devoe neglected your sister?"

"Yes, we do. For the wife of a man who has been medically trained, a man who had actively practiced at one time, to die of eclampsia is criminal."

Edwards' voice rose in mixed tones of challenge and appeal. Helen Edwards said nothing, her eyes, large behind her glasses, fixed and hypnotic, the fingers of one hand pulling a plant tie through the

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fingers of the other. She gave the impression that she never blinked, MacCrae thought.

"And that is all we intend to say about it," Edwards said. "We just cannot talk about it."

MacCrae got up, deciding it was useless to press his queries. But he would come back, and come back again, until little by little the Edwardses, who he could see were decent, kindly people, could be made to change their minds.

As if to make amends for their lack of cooperation, Edwards said, "You used to do building around Weston. Maybe you'd like to take a look at what I'm planning here. I'm on a committee that's working on plans to spruce up the old section of town for Weston's two-hundredth birthday. Mostly cosmetic, unfortunately."

Aware of the friendliness that prompted the offer, MacCrae set himself to listen while the old engineer went over the project. In describing one of his proposals, Edwards referred to a large framed map of the town, placing it on the drafting table. MacCrae looked at the map casually, following Edwards' pencil along the old streets, Main, First, Second.

He saw a situation that he had already been vaguely aware of but whose implication he had failed to grasp. As he stared at the map, he forced himself to suppress the hope that had sprung up within him. His chance of being proved right was almost non-existent. But what choice did he have?

A blue and gold sign reading *Entering Weston* marked the town line. Glover's Run approached the road on the left side, a small determined rivulet that persisted in spite of the heat. MacCrae wondered what part of the luxuriant plant life along the stream's borders was represented by Mrs. Callender's marsh marigolds. The stream disappeared under the road in a culvert but did not emerge on the other side where the filled land of its bed was occupied by backyards and gardens.

From Callender's geodetic map and from Edwards' map of the old section of town, he knew that Glover's Run flowed in roughly a straight line for a quarter of a mile to the river, between Main Street and First Street. He climbed down to the culvert's entrance where the creek flowed into the big pipe, tannish-green ropes of algae twisting sluggishly in the brown water. Waving ineffectually at the cloud of mosquitoes that rose in the morning sunlight, he crouched and entered the pipe.

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Don't walk in the water, he cautioned himself mockingly, you'll ruin your new jail shoes. High on the sides of the pipe he could see the high water marks left by the spring rains, their height proving that the town fathers had known what they were about when they confined this innocuous-appearing stream in forty-eight-inch pipe. As he bent over a few feet in from the entrance, a swirl of midges dancing about him, a car passed on the road directly over his head, giving out a subterranean, cushioned rumble.

With one hand guiding against the side of the pipe and with the flashlight in the other, he made his way in sloshing, crouching steps into the clammy darkness. Each section of pipe, he knew, was four feet long. By counting the sections he could determine how far he had progressed. His hunched posture soon became intolerable and he was forced to crawl, stopping frequently to lie flat in the oozy sediment to relieve the cramp that seized him. His clothes were soaked with slimy mud and his knees were growing raw from contact with the pipe.

As he rested on his side against the curve of the pipe, he noticed a short mark of white paint at the center of the top surface of the pipe, the seventeenth section if he had kept a correct count. Looking back, he could see the diminishing circle of light that marked the opening of the culvert. He was tempted to turn back but felt himself in the grip of an irrational determination to do something even though the doing would prove futile.

He rolled over to his hands and knees and continued his crawl. His trousers soon gave way at the knees, permitting the gravel imbedded in the sediment to punish his skin further. The air grew danker and stiller, as if it had not changed in the five or six decades since the pipe sections were mortared together, forever shutting off the sun from this last stretch of Glover's Run. Again he saw the white paint mark, this time at the end of the thirty-third section of pipe.

He remembered the stories he had read as a child of heroes who ventured into caves, marking their return path by trailing string behind them. Did Gerry Callender use string in his cave explorations, he wondered? He kept looking back toward the entrance, but it was not until he was at the end of the sixty-sixth section of pipe, also marked in white, that he could no longer see daylight. Feeling that he had reached a point of no return, he began to forge ahead as rapidly as he could, deeper into the darkness.

He had counted off the three-hundred-and-thirtieth section, noting

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that the white paint mark occurred alternately at the middle and end of every seventeenth section, when he saw ahead the glimmer of light where the pipe discharged into the river. His feelings were divided between relief at the prospect of coming out into the open air, now only several hundred feet away, and disappointment at failing to prove what had been in the first place an unlikely possibility. Once more he gathered himself and resumed his advance.

The legs of an aluminum stepladder blocked his way, extending upward through a large irregular opening that had been battered through the pipe. At the foot of the ladder a dam of twigs and debris had formed in which broken fragments of pipe lay scattered. Slowly, with the ladder pressing against his legs and the shattered edges of the pipe scraping his back, he forced himself upward until his head and shoulders emerged into a chimney-like hole in the earth. Placing one foot on the bottom rung, he carefully raised himself into the hole. Two more rungs and his head projected above the surface of the earth.

He was in a crawl space under the floor of a building, with the floor joists three feet above his head and extending to the low foundation walls. Above the joists he could see the boards of the rough flooring, laid diagonally to the joists. Climbing out of the hole, he crawled about the space and found the earth littered with the casual rejects of construction work—fragments of wood, rusty nails, a newspaper whose headlines announced the election of a president already fifty years dead, and a glass milk bottle inscribed with the name of a dairy which he knew had succumbed before he was born.

Then his groping fingers found an artifact which had not been available when the carpenters had nailed down the last of the flooring over the crawl space. It was no string to lead an explorer back to safety perhaps, but maybe enough to tie someone to murder. He stuffed it into his pocket, not sure of its significance.

On his second circuit of the area his light picked out a rectangle formed by saw cuts in the rough flooring. Cleats had been nailed across to hold the severed boards in place. On one end were two downward-swinging hinges. Extending across the rectangle and holding it firmly in place were two flat iron bars which fitted into metal brackets at each end.

Someone had cut a trap door into the floor. He crouched under it, preparing to slide the bars from their brackets and discover what building he was under, when a voice spoke over his head, a voice he had heard again and again in his despairing prison nights.

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"Now there you are, Mrs. Melick. When you're ready to put the box back into the vault, you just call me."

"Mr. Callender won't be back today," Callender's secretary told him. "You could call tomorrow. I did hear him say he was going out to see Roy Edwards, something about the Weston bicentennial."

As he drove out to the Edwards house, MacCrae wondered if the secretary had noticed the sagging pocket where he carried the gun. He pulled into the driveway and saw again the sign advertising Roy Edwards' services as a surveyor. The sight of the sign acted as a reagent on the murky solution of fact, impression, and hunch that swirled in his consciousness, precipitating one clear and undeniable fact.

To be sure of his conclusion, he pulled out an envelope—it was addressed to the prison, he noted bitterly, and contained a request from the Weston bicentennial commission for funds—and did a simple calculation. He leaped out of the car, dashed up the steps, and was about to hammer on the door but restrained himself.

Helen Edwards answered the door, regarding him with her strained, watchful look, making MacCrae think she resembled an esoteric security device that could be triggered only by some subliminal stimulus.

"He and Gerry Callender are back there," she said as she held the door aside. "Please come in."

Callender and Edwards were bent over the drafting table, engaged in the age-old contest between designer and financial backer.

"I know it will cost more, Gerry, but let's do it right."

"I know, Roy, but does something that's not intended to be permanent have to be so well built?"

They turned away from the table, any intended greeting halted by the excited look on MacCrae's face. Edwards shot a swift glance at his sister as if seeking to share in any advance knowledge she might have. Callender looked at MacCrae with concern and was about to speak when MacCrae asked, "Did you know there were two ways to get into your bank, Gerry?"

"What are you talking about? There's only one."

"No, there are two. The second one is a way that wouldn't be attempted, or maybe even thought of, except by somebody who isn't afraid to crawl about underground. Somebody who made a hobby of exploring caves and was ingenious enough to combine his cave experience with the knowledge he got from maps. All this in order to

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get even with a man who had injured him, a man who had done him out of money perhaps. Remember telling me that Devoe had taken your bank on some business deal?"

"Tom! What's got into you?"

"Let me tell you how it could have been done." MacCrae thought of his five years of hard time and struggled to control his anger. "You were in a position to know that Devoe came to the bank every Monday morning. It was easy to learn which booth in the safe-deposit room he always used. You knew that the room had been added onto the bank. From your geodetic map you could guess that the pipe ran under that room. Cutting a trap door under the shelf of the Number One booth wasn't—"

"Stop it! You must be sick!"

"Then when all the preparations were made, when you heard the guard admit Devoe to the booth, all you had to do was open the trap door, put your arm up through the aperture, and fire. It was unfortunate that the gun was dropped but even that turned out for the best. I was caught with it."

"Your time in prison has—" Callender began and stopped. "How could a trap door in the floor of the booth go unnoticed? That room is vacuum-cleaned every night. It would be seen right away."

"But the floor is covered by a thick-piled, wall-to-wall carpet. As long as the cuts were sharp and clean, the depth of the pile would hide them.

"And that's how it was done," MacCrae concluded. "The murder for which I did five years."

He drew the gun from his pocket. Now, now was the time he had promised himself. The five years could never be wiped out but they could be balanced.

The three stared in fright at the gun, Callender's rosy face draining to white, Roy and Helen Edwards each weakly raising a hand in futile protest at the violence MacCrae had introduced into their quiet, ordered lives.

"You had the motive, you had the means, you had the experience, but"—he turned to Roy and Helen Edwards—"he didn't kill Dr. Devoe, did he?"

The two recoiled, Roy overwhelmed and confused by MacCrae's change in target, Helen alert, her magnified eyes on the gun in MacCrae's hand.

"You, Helen, worked in the bank before you retired and devoted yourself to gardening." He waved toward the staked and ordered

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plants beyond the windows. "You knew when Devoe used the safe-deposit room.

"And you, Roy, you knew from the town maps that Glover's Run flowed behind the bank. It wasn't too hard to figure out the distance from where the stream went into the culvert under the highway to the point where it went under the room that had been built on the filled land."

"Well, yes, you could figure it from a scale map," Edwards said, regaining some composure at dealing with a familiar topic. "But that doesn't mean I had anything to do with it."

"You have a sign outside that says you survey properties."

"Every now and then somebody asks me to check out a deed, stuff like that, yes."

"When a surveyor measures—measures length, that is—how does he do it?"

"Nowadays a lot of them use a steel tape but I still use a surveyor's chain. 'Chain it,' we say, when we mean measure it."

"Now, I crawled through that pipe and I found white paint marks on the top surface. In the middle of the seventeenth section, at the end of the thirty-third section, in the middle of the forty-ninth section, alternately at the middle and the end. Each section of pipe was four feet long, so these marks occurred every sixteen and a half sections. By the way, how long is a surveyor's chain?"

He saw the fright leap into Edwards' face. Helen Edwards shot a hand out to grasp her brother's arm, whether to steady him or to hold him to some task MacCrae could only guess.

"It's sixty-six feet, isn't it? Four times sixteen and a half."

Edwards nodded dumbly, his features collapsed in misery.

"Only a surveyor would have gone about measuring that way. I say you are the one who provided access to that room. I say that one of you shot Dr. Devoe. The motive was the death of your sister Angela."

Before Edwards could speak, his sister led him away to the windows overlooking the garden where they talked in low tense tones. But in less than a minute Helen wheeled away and returned to face MacCrae.

"You can't prove a thing," she said. "And if your insane story is made public, made public by an ex-con, we shall see to it that—"

"Just a minute, Helen. Just a minute." Roy Edwards took his place beside her. "This man did five years for a crime he didn't commit. I refuse to go on like this any longer."

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"Hold it!" MacCrae broke in. "You've told me all I want to know."

He raised the gun and looked over it at the two aging people, thought of the unforgivable act that had been carried out, an act which although born out of grief and loss was still a crime, thought of the further unpardonable deed of letting an innocent man stand punishment. Look at them, he told himself. Are they bad people? They're like everybody else, capable of anything. The prospect of revenge that had nurtured him for five years withered. He put the gun away.

"What do you mean? What are you going to do?" Helen asked.

"I'm not going to do anything. The price is paid. There is no point in paying it twice." He turned to Callender. "Let's go, Gerry."

As they stood in the driveway before getting into their cars, MacCrae asked, "What about you, Gerry? Are you going to say anything about it?"

Callender stared across the grass at the sign offering Roy Edwards' surveying services.

"No. Remember the other day I told you this town was full of secrets."

"Good." MacCrae held out his hand. "Goodbye, Gerry. And thanks."

He left Callender standing in the driveway. He started the engine and drove out of town. When he reached the town line, where his side of the blue and gold sign said *Leaving Weston*, he pulled up to the side of the road, got out and looked down at Glover's Run.

From his pocket he took out what he had found in the crawl space under the trap door—a piece of flat covered wire, encased in green plastic, six or so inches in length, the kind he had seen protruding from Helen Edwards' shirt pocket, the kind that was used to tie plants to stakes.

He tossed the plant tie into Glover's Run, got back into the car, and left Weston for the last time, carrying with him one more of the town's secrets.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

CELIA FREMLIN

Edith was a veteran of nearly forty holiday cruises. "She'd had her day"—looking for a Man—but now "she was content—content to be old and unwanted, and with only herself to please." When you were old, "you could get away with just about anything" . . .

ANYTHING MAY HAPPEN

by CELIA FREMLIN

Edith found herself almost the first one on board. Well, after nearly forty cruising holidays—two a year regularly, spring and autumn, ever since her husband died—she, if anyone, should know the ropes. Not for her the shuffling, uneven progress of the anxious novices, zigzagging uncertainly from one queue to another with their passports, boarding cards, and the rest, asking advice from one another, the blind leading the blind—"Excuse me, do you happen to know . . .?"—"But it says here . . .?"

Once, Edith had been one of them, but not now. Now she knew exactly where to go in the big departure shed, exactly which papers to have ready for which uniformed official. And so here she was, in the pale autumn sunshine, leaning smugly and contentedly over the rail of the Promenade Deck, surveying the tight-packed mass of blue-rinsed perms and bright daring headscarves swaying up the gangway below, listening to the chatter and twitter of the massed excitement rising as from a flock of birds.

From up here, from the vantage point of her two decades of cruising experience and of her seventy-odd years, Edith could only smile pityingly at all this excitement, all this hope, all this anticipation of adventure and of new beginnings.

It wouldn't happen. She could have told them. Yes, she could have

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told them straightaway, before they'd even booked, that their chances of finding a Man on this trip were absolutely nil. Well, you had only to look down from up here, and with your own eyes you could assess the odds. Such male heads as could be discerned at all, bobbing about here and there amid the surging female sea, were mostly bald; some wore hearing aids; and all were unmistakably in the possession of some attendant female whose determination that it should stay that way was absolute.

It was always like this on these cruises. Once aboard, you felt that you had entered a world in which the human male was some sort of endangered species, so rarely did you encounter a specimen, and so carefully protected was it. And, of course, as is commonly the case with rare and endangered species, the ban on hunting and trapping was total.

Not that any of this mattered to Edith any more. For her, the hunt for a Man was long over—and in a way this was a great freedom. It was like the laying down of some burden you have been carrying all your life—and now, suddenly, you are without it, free. Deprived as well, of course—just as a mountaineer is deprived if he loses his rucksack over the edge of a precipice; but how agile the disaster renders him for the remainder of his climb! How swift, and unencumbered, and strong!

Looking around at her fellow passengers, now surging all over the deck, with their careful, expensive makeup, and their brave, brand-new cruising outfits, Edith could feel nothing but pity, and a deep thankfulness to be out of it all.

She'd had her day. Several days, if you could put it that way. But now it was over, and she was content—content to be old and unnoticed, and with only herself to please. Not to want a man is assuredly the next best thing to having one, and infinitely less trouble.

All the same, Edith found herself scanning the people coming on board with lively interest. Although she was not looking for a Man, she was looking for *someone* to be a companion during the coming two weeks. Some woman around her own age, a widow preferably, with whom to chat, and pass remarks about the other passengers. Together they would sit on deck, out of the wind, showing photographs of grandchildren and consulting one another about knitting patterns.

Among all the lonely, aging women who frequented these cruises it wasn't usually hard to find someone to fill this undemanding role that Edith had in mind for her.

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On this occasion it was even easier than usual, for, as luck would have it, the cabin mate allotted to her turned out to be just the sort of person Edith would have chosen had she been given her pick from the whole passenger list. Lorna Carruthers was sixty-nine years old, a grandmother, complete with photographs (but not too many), and was likewise a widow. She also possessed one other quality that especially appealed to Edith, though admittedly it would not have had this effect on everyone: she suffered from depression. Apparently she had been chivvied into this trip by a very fed-up married daughter for this very reason.

Edith was good with depressives—it was a skill she had learned over the years. Her genuine, not to say eager, interest in all their concerns was just what they needed—or thought they needed, anyway. Having once discovered Edith, they would cling to her as to a lifeline throughout the voyage; and this, of course, was nice for Edith, too. Everyone enjoys being needed, particularly if it is only for a fortnight; and Edith was no exception.

"You see, Edith," Lorna Carruthers explained (already they were on Christian-name terms, before the vessel was well out of harbor), "You see, the real trouble is, I feel so *useless* these days. There seems to be no *point* in anything any more."

The two of them were changing for dinner, as best they could in the tiny cabin, and Lorna's pink, puckered little face looked sadder than ever peering into the mirror while with unsteady hand she sought to apply pale pink lipstick to her pale, downturned lips.

"You see," she continued, "since Dear Harold died" (four years ago, Edith had already ascertained) "and since Rosemary got married, and since Michael got this job in Hong Kong . . . "

Edith had heard it all before, of course, in all its painful permutations and combinations, from her many and various traveling companions over the past twenty years, but somehow it never palled; she never showed the least impatience. Partly, this was because she knew, by now, exactly the right things to say.

But my dear, *of course* they still need you! What would those lovely kiddies do without their Granny? Oh. Oh, I see, well, that's a pity; but you know, the youngsters just *are* like that nowadays—it doesn't mean they don't love you *really.* And yes, your Rosemary *should* visit more often, I agree, but I expect she's got her hands full, what with one thing and another . . . Oh, but my dear, *no,* you mustn't take it like that! These things are always flaring up between mothers and daughters, it's well-known. She'll get over it, you'll

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see . . . Ah, my dear, but that's just being silly, talking like that! Of course he still loves his Mum! But after all, Hong Kong *is* a long way off, and you know what the young fellows are *like* when it comes to letter writing. It doesn't mean that they don't love you *really* . . .

If she'd repeated that last sentence once, she'd repeated it a dozen times; but Lorna, though seeming to listen hungrily, enjoying the sympathy, was evidently not yet ready to be consoled.

"They make me feel so *old*, Edith, so cast aside and done for!" she wailed, tearfully patting her exquisitely tinted curls into place behind her ears. "Sometimes, you know, when the phone hasn't rung for days, and no one's been to see me, sometimes I just sit there in my empty house, staring into space, and I ask myself: what's the point of it all? Why am I here? Sometimes I just can't think what I'm *for!*"

If the truth were told, Edith couldn't have said what *she* was for, either; but somehow it never bothered her. Indeed it often seemed to her that it was this very feeling of not being *for* anything any longer, of no longer being anyone's mainstay, or the center of anyone's life, or the object of anyone's devotion—that was one of the most wonderful things about getting old. Such a sense of freedom it brought with it! Such a miraculous falling away of Life's Duties and Obligations! It didn't matter *what* you did once you were old and unwanted; you could get away with just about anything.

But this was not a point of view likely to appeal to these depressed widows, or even to be comprehended by them; so Edith left the thought unspoken, and resumed the safe and well-tried routine.

Useless and done for? What nonsense! And as for being old, why, sixty-nine is no age at all these days, and anyway, no one would take Lorna for a day over fifty, truly they wouldn't. And, my goodness, what lovely earrings! They *do* suit you, dear—bring out the green in your eyes.

It was unfortunate (and in no way Edith's fault, she couldn't possibly have known) that the earrings in question should turn out to have been an anniversary present—the *last* anniversary present—from poor Darling Harold. *Real emeralds*, Lorna was at pains to point out through her tears—so like Dear Harold. Such lovely presents he always gave her, such a darling, generous man.

What with one thing and another, they were late for dinner; but there seemed to be no really humane way of getting Lorna to speed up the process of drying her tears and re-doing her face; and so Edith gave up trying. Her eyes resting thoughtfully on the well-stocked

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jewel box from which the earrings had emerged, Edith found herself, as so often in the past, filled with wonder at the reckless abandon with which these grief-stricken widows would bring thousands of pounds worth of jewelry with them on these trips. Anything—*anything*—to catch a Man. It was amazing. What a price to set on one of those balding, mottled heads!

Though it must be admitted that this Lorna Carruthers wasn't quite so silly as some Edith had known. She did at least lock up the jewel box before leaving the cabin, and hide it beneath some underwear at the back of a drawer. And if she failed to see Edith noticing just where in her handbag she slipped the key—well, you could hardly blame her for that, could you? After all, they were going to be bosom friends, weren't they, for the duration of the voyage—for two whole weeks, in fact, before parting forever with a passionate exchange of addresses, and empty, reiterated promises to write to each other. Such is the nature of shipboard intimacy; and it often occurred to Edith that she could even have given her real address, and it wouldn't have mattered. Still, it would have been a silly risk to take, and quite pointless. Better, by far, to stick to the old and well-tried methods, especially at her age.

The scenario was so familiar now, so predictable. The anxious, flurried morning of disembarkation, with people rushing here and there all over the ship looking for mislaid bits of property; everything at sixes and sevens, and in the midst of all the chaos Edith, calm and supportive, helping her current bosom friend to pack, to fill in her Landing Card, to sort out her English and foreign coins, to decide how large a tip to leave for which of the stewards. Oh, Edith was invaluable, and sooner or later the bosom friend would be bound to have her back turned for a few seconds, searching for something at the back of a locker or saying goodbye to someone in the doorway. And a few seconds was all it needed, so much research having already gone into the subject's little habits, the whereabouts of her valuables, her keys . . .

Watching her new friend zip up the inner compartment of her handbag this first evening, Edith could justly congratulate herself on having got the Lorna Carruthers Research Project off to a good start.

Naturally, by the time they reached the dining room, all the best tables were gone—the tables, that is, where one or another of the ship's officers—the Purser it might be, or the Chief Engineer—was

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making it his business to be handsome and jolly, and to flatter all the ladies in his vicinity, no matter how old or ugly.

No such luck for Edith and Lorna. They found themselves, instead, at a table with three other women as elderly as themselves, and an even more elderly man whose proud owner, conscious of her good fortune, beamed indefatigably under the nonstop snubs and put-downs to which he treated her throughout the meal.

Still, it turned out in the end to be quite a good evening. The food, as always on these cruises, was delicious, though there was far too much of it. And afterward, bundled into their warmest woollies and tweeds atop their sleeveless dinner gowns, the two friends went up on deck, braving the wind whipping in out of the darkness, in order to watch the lights of Newcastle grow faint and yet fainter across the black racing sea.

"This is the best part, I sometimes think," mused Edith, leaning heavily on the starboard rail (for it had been a tiring day), "seeing England disappearing in the distance, and knowing that you are *away!* Away into the open sea—off into the unknown—the feeling that just *anything* may be going to happen . . . "

She stopped. No point in putting Lorna on her guard against unexpected happenings. Quickly she changed the subject: "Have you seen the midnight sun ever? Of course, it's too late in the year this time, but . . . "

Another mistake. Because—wouldn't you know it?—Lorna *had* seen the midnight sun, but in the company of poor Darling Harold . . . their very last trip together, actually, before . . . before . . .

Her tears fell fast, but dried almost as swiftly in the black icy wind against her cheeks. Somewhere, deep in the heart of the ship, dance music had started up, a faint, insistent throbbing against the noise of the sea. Time was—and not so very long ago, either—when the sound would have drawn Edith like a magnet, out of the windy darkness into the lighted ballroom. She had been a beautiful dancer once. Five years ago—even four—she would have been on the floor with the best of them, and even now it was only this wretched arthritis in her knee that held her back. It had been worsening gradually for some time now, and she'd had to recognize that her dancing days were over. Pride, and the memory of her one-time prowess, would not allow her to go limping gamely round the floor, as so many of the oldsters seemed happy to do.

The lights of Newcastle had quite vanished.

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They were alone with the sea, and the dark curve of the earth. Her ears were beginning to ache with the cold.

"Let's go in," she said, with a little shiver. "I'm beginning to feel chilly. Let's have an early night."

Lorna didn't immediately answer. She seemed to be half mesmerized by the dark heaving water beneath them, and the white flecks of foam spinning endlessly past her field of vision and away into the night. When at last she raised her head, her small worried profile, silhouetted against the swaying sky, seemed to be wobbling a little, as if she might be about to cry all over again.

"If only I had the courage!" she muttered, though carefully loud enough for Edith to hear, "If only I had the guts. Just one moment of steeling myself—and then to sink, to vanish, to be one with all that black water, whirling, whirling away into nothingness—nothing to worry about ever again . . . "

In a way, nothing could have suited Edith's plans better, but since it wasn't going to happen there was no point in thinking about it. For Lorna was right—she *hadn't* got the courage. None of them ever had, though goodness knows how many of them had stood, just like this, by the rail, mouthing this sort of self-pitying drivel.

There is only one sort of role for the bosom friend to play in this situation, and reluctantly Edith played it. First, a restraining hand on the silly woman's shoulder, for all the world as if she really *might* be going to jump, then all the right bracing exhortations.

Don't be ridiculous, you just *mustn't* talk like that! Think of all you have to live for! Think of Rosemary, and . . . and (God, what *was* the fellow's name!) . . . and . . . your son! Think how awful *they'd* feel! How guilty, how grief-stricken! And those darling popeyed grandchildren (only of course Edith didn't actually say popeyed, her self-control on these occasions was absolute). You mustn't *dream* of anything so wicked! And so foolish, too, just think of all the happy years that may be ahead for you! You should be so lucky, you silly cow; only of course Edith didn't say this, either, it would have wrecked everything.

With the almost indecent haste of most of these pseudo-suicides, Lorna allowed herself to be persuaded away from the rail and down the companionway, out of sight of the wild wind-blown sea.

Back in the cabin, they talked far into the night about Life and Death and Loneliness, and Rosemary's way of cooking cauliflower which took all the nutrition out of it.

And Edith, already in bed in the top bunk, kept murmuring, "Yes,"

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and "No," and "I should think not, indeed!" while watching Lorna's long and elaborate preparations for the night, including where exactly she stored her anti-wrinkle cream. You never knew what might turn out to be important.

The next day dawned bright and calm, perfect cruising weather. The sun shone, the vast circle of the sea stretched blue and sparkling in every direction, and in company with the other old ladies, Edith and Lorna joined the Yoga Class up on the Sports Deck. Neither of them could have been said to shine at Yoga, but on the other hand they weren't the worst at it either—this would have been an achievement indeed. And it did serve to fill up the time before lunch, always a problem on these shipboard holidays.

And after lunch, while the sun still shone and shone, reflected back like diamonds from the icy Northern sea, the two of them found deckchairs in the lee of the wind, and talked, desultorily, while they knitted, about daily helps and the ingratitude of grown-up children. This occupied them until teatime, and by the time tea was over, the sharp dazzle of the sun had begun to fade. Already, only one day out, you were aware of the shortening hours of daylight; already there was an unfamiliar bite in the air, straight from the Arctic, and indescribably alien.

With rugs round their knees, and pulling their cardigans closer about them, Edith and Lorna sat a little longer, watching the huge ball of the sun go down over the restless water, turning it blood-red as they watched, while to the north and east the blue-gray beginnings of darkness were already gathering.

"Another fine day tomorrow," prophesied Edith, out of the depth of her experience, and as so often happened, she was absolutely right.

The weather on this trip was incredibly good, everyone said so. And at this time of year, too, you wouldn't credit it. It put everybody in a fine mood. The beauty of the islands, of the fjords, of the Icelandic coast, was duly gasped at; and those who went on the shore trips came back with the usual tales of fantastic bargains, of comic natives, and of knowing the Norwegian/Icelandic/Finnish for "How much?"

The shore trips didn't interest Edith—she'd done it all before; but Lorna seemed infected by the general enthusiasm and went nearly everywhere, coming back laden with purchases, and apparently

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well-pleased with herself. There was no more talk of suicide, nor of depression either; and so when, on the very last night, after the Celebration Dinner and the Fancy Dress Ball and the farewell drinking parties, when, after all this exhausting revelry, Lorna announced her intention of going up on deck for "a breath of fresh air," Edith hardly gave it a thought. Or, rather, she only thought of it insofar as it facilitated her own plans here in the cabin. Not that she had any intention of stealing any of Lorna's possessions here and now: that must wait till the morning, lest Lorna should take it into her head to check the contents of her jewel box last thing before packing it.

All the same there were one or two things that could usefully be prepared in advance, and here was the opportunity, with Lorna safely out of the cabin. For instance, it would be wise to try out the jewel-box key now while she had the chance, so that when the time came she wouldn't waste valuable seconds turning it the wrong way, or something.

Hell! The wretched woman had taken her handbag with her! Complete, of course, with the key in that inner pocket! Blast her! What in God's name did she want a *handbag* for, up on the bleak, black deck, with the wind whistling in off the sea? Tissues to wipe her eyes over Darling Harold? Serve her right if she dropped the bag overboard! Silly, tiresome cow!

Oh, well, she'd just have a look at the lock anyway, get some sort of idea of the kind of lock it was. Briskly she opened Lorna's underwear drawer and reached under the vests and knickers.

It was gone! The jewel box was gone, vanished! On this last night, of all nights. Wildly, Edith searched Lorna's other drawers—her locker—her suitcase; but it was nowhere.

At the thought that some other thief might have got in ahead of her, Edith felt rising in her a slow, incredulous rage, a sense of injustice so intense that it almost choked her. After all the work she'd put into it—all the boring tête-à-têtes, the yoga classes, the knitting patterns—after all this, for a total stranger to come along at the last moment and scoop the pool—it was monstrous!

And where *was* Lorna, anyway? Why couldn't she look after her stuff? She'd been gone for almost an hour—what on earth could she be *doing* up there on the heaving, deserted decks at this God-forsaken hour—nearly two in the morning?

It was a moonless night, and Edith, making her way from deck

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to deck, back and forth along the narrow, rocking gangways, felt herself to be moving almost in a dream. The whole ship seemed completely deserted. The Sports Deck, normally so crowded and jolly, was silent and empty, and still littered with rubbish from the evening's revels—soft-drink bottles, beer cans, colored streamers all gray together under these dimmed lights.

Edith shivered, partly from cold, partly from the desolation of the scene before her. The wind whipped against her face, while somewhere out of sight the black sea churned and boiled.

Somewhere, amid all this desolation, Lorna was wandering; and suddenly, with dreadful vividness, Edith was reminded of that first night on deck, and Lorna's wild threats of suicide. At the time Edith had taken them to be a piece of play-acting, typical of these neurotic, depressed women—but could she be sure? Might it be that tonight, emboldened by the few unaccustomed drinks that the festivities had more or less forced on her—might it be that the wretched woman had found at last the courage of which she had declared herself in need?

But what about the missing jewels, and the handbag? Too much of a coincidence that at the exact moment when Lorna had decided to do herself in, a jewel thief should decide to raid the cabin. Even as she posed the problem to herself, Edith found an answer, flashing across her brain with a kind of intuitive certainty.

Of course! Poor Darling Harold! What more likely than that the silly sentimental fool should decide to take with her to her watery grave all those "lovely presents" he had given her!

That many thousands of pounds should go to the bottom of the sea for the sake of beastly old long-dead Darling Harold was intolerable.

Her failing strength renewed by a sense of total outrage, Edith resumed her search with a driving, terrible sense of urgency.

It was on the lowest deck of all that she finally came upon her quarry, and apparently only just in time, for Lorna was leaning far over the rail, staring out across the black whirling water with just that same half-mesmerized air that she had displayed on that first evening. Her handbag was hooked over one arm, and—yes—clutched to her breast was a dark object that must surely be the jewel box.

With her eyes, Edith measured the distance; measured, too, the angle at which the woman was leaning over the rail, and the precise position of the precious box. Edith would have taken account, too,

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of her own arthritic knee, except that suddenly and mysteriously it had completely stopped hurting.

You couldn't call it murder, not really. The woman had just simply overbalanced when Edith pounced on her so suddenly from behind and grabbed the jewel box from her. It wasn't anyone's fault; it was just an accident.

Mercifully there had been no witnesses, though Edith had experienced one nasty moment when, barely a minute later, a small boat had appeared out of the darkness, quite dangerously near. For an awful second Edith thought it must be the start of a rescue operation, but when nothing further happened—no commotion, no cries of "Man overboard!"—she realized, thankfully, that she must have been mistaken. Some stray fishing-boat perhaps which had gone off course; they were hugging the shore closely at this stage of the trip.

Really, everything had gone off marvelously well. Back in the cabin, Edith tore the box free from the tightly closed plastic sack to which Lorna had apparently seen fit to consign it, ready for its burial at sea; and for a while she sat there, striking the smooth contours lovingly, gloating over her triumph.

Nothing could go wrong now. No one would notice Lorna Carruthers' absence until quite late in the morning, when Edith, and all the other passengers, would be safely on shore. Then, and not before, they would come and clear the cabins, and would be mystified to find Lorna's belongings still there; but by then Edith would be far away, and besides, there would be no reason to connect *her* with her cabin mate's inexplicable departure without her luggage.

The only remaining hazard was the Customs, and this, really, was hardly a hazard at all. Even if they *did* insist on prising the box open (the key, of course, had vanished into the sea together with the handbag), they could have no possible reason for suspecting that the jewels were not Edith's own; and if they somehow worked it that she had to pay duty on some of the contents—well, who cared? The profits would still be enormous.

They didn't ask her to pay duty, but they did ask her to step into the office of the Harbour Police, when they found the packets of heroin tucked carefully beneath the few remaining jewels—the rest having gone to pay the agents during those oh-so-innocent shore trips.

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Edith was stunned; but less by the awfulness of her predicament than by a searing sense of grief and loss.

What a friend Lorna Carruthers might have become, if only they'd known what each other was up to! What fun they could have had, leaning together over the rail last night, watching for Lorna's accomplices to draw alongside in their small boat! And then to hurl the treasure, buoyant and waterproof in its plastic sack, out into the darkness, and to watch some shadowy, lithe figure dive to its rescue with infinite grace and skill!

What a spectacle! What an experience! And at last, a friend to share it with!

What a future they could have shared, too—companions in crime, working the routes together, each plying her own specialty, and giggling together like schoolgirls over their respective triumphs! What soulmates they would have been, exploiting together that secret bonus of being old and unwanted—the ability, at last, to get away with *anything!*

Hardened criminal though she was, Edith felt the tears welling up in her old eyes as she set herself to talk her way out of *this* one.

NEXT ISSUE...

13 ***NEW*** stories—including

EDWARD D. HOCH (about Nick Velvet)

MICHAEL GILBERT (about Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens)

BILL PRONZINI (about the hanging man)

LAWRENCE BLOCK (about going through the motions)

and an "unknown" reprint by

PETER LOVESEY (about a bride in the bath)

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a *NEW* detective story by

LIONEL BOOKER

A revealing look behind the scenes of Hollywood, where "notoriety, publicity—that's the name of the game" . . .

THE BIG BREAK

by LIONEL BOOKER

I hadn't been back to California for almost two decades, not since I had spent a fruitless and penniless year between college and the army trying to crash the movies. When I left to answer my draft notice I swore one day to return in triumph. The chance to repeat my small part in a Broadway show inside one of Los Angeles' hangar-like theaters could hardly be said to herald a victorious re-entry, but by then I had learned that any employment in show business was, in its own way, a triumph. I agreed to come out for the three months' run.

I found the place somewhat changed in those intervening years, with a plethora of pornographic movie houses along Hollywood Boulevard where the old re-run theaters used to be and where I had spent most of my time during those earlier lean months. A lot of the independent coffee houses, familiarly called "Biff's," "Lou's," "Dan's," and so on, had been replaced by franchised fast-food restaurants, but they were still populated by young, unshaven or uncoiffured hopefuls staring out the windows at the sunny but indifferent world.

One of my few friends out here was living in the once uninhabited San Fernando Valley, now abounding with homes, business districts, and construction companies, thanks to the miracle of air-conditioning, and I called him soon after my arrival.

Jack Dunn was a few years younger than me, coming in as a

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freshman at our old college while I was entering my senior year; but we had become good friends during those scholastic times and the even more educational ones in New York where we were both struggling actors. He had heard the call of filmdom a few years back and decided it was more pleasant to be unemployed in a desert climate than in an industrial one. He said on the phone that he was delighted to hear from me and immediately asked me to come to his minuscule apartment off Lankershim Boulevard where we spent the late afternoon and early evening discussing our present status and gossiping about our more successful friends. The main topic of the latter category was, of course, Richard Cunningham.

Most of you have seen Dick in some picture or another, or possibly on television talk-show interviews. He had been with us in college, in Jack's class, but shortly after getting to New York he got what every actor manages to get through each week expecting—the big break. While still an unknown he was cast in a Broadway hit which suddenly turned him from an unwanted and unnoticed hopeful among the thousands to a very desirable commodity—what is called a "hot" commodity. Offers poured in for more shows, television appearances, and movie assignments. I always felt that Dick's talent was in inverse proportion to his business shrewdness, which may have been why he survived the perils of "overnight" success and went on to become a power in Hollywood. He still acted but now he had his own production company, in partnership with an agent named Carl Maxwell, which spewed out a series of box-office hits that raked in fortunes on their first release and were mercifully forgotten by the next year.

One thing you could say about Richard Cunningham. He knew this business inside out.

"I haven't seen him since I came out here," Jack admitted to me while tending the plants that seem to adorn every window in his tiny abode, "but then I never had the nerve to give him a call."

I could understand this. There was always a hesitancy to approach old friends who have become renowned in fear of rejection or being considered an opportunist. But, despite what had been said about him in courtrooms by his ex-wives' divorce lawyers, Dick had always been a likable, friendly fellow, and I was a little surprised by Jack's reticence. After all, he had been out here three years.

"Three years without work," he reminded me with his characteristically sad smile. "Oh, I go away for a couple of months to a regional theater, but I've never got a piece of film or tape on me yet."

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"Don't you get any auditions?" I asked.

He squirted some insecticide onto a fern, or whatever it was, as his smile got broader and a bit sadder. "You're still new out here. You don't understand the system yet. Nobody wants to take chances. If they don't know you they won't hire you—unless you're twenty-two years old and look like Travolta. But with guys like us there has to be some reason to hire us other than our talent. We have to have done something big before, or been in something that makes them want to come to see us. Notoriety, publicity—that's the name of the game."

In the coming weeks I found out how true his words were. Even though I was in a hit play I found myself going wearily from talent agency to talent agency and getting turned down for representation. A teenager who extra-ed in the show was signed in a week. As the run was nearing its end I got a call direct from a studio. A casting director had seen me on stage and felt I was right for a series pilot for TV, playing the friend of the hero.

My competition were all in their twenties, even though the script designated the character to be "around forty," and I still recall the frustration in the casting agent's voice after I read and got the part. "Do you know how hard it is to find somebody your age nowadays?" After that I had my pick of agents but Jack Dunn continued to languish in his small apartment, reading the trades and watering his plants.

It was while filming the pilot that I ran into Dick Cunningham. I had heard he was finishing up the shooting of his latest feature on the same lot, and when I walked into the commissary there he was, sitting alone in the corner. He hadn't changed much, but then I had been to most of his pictures, so it wasn't as if I was seeing him after a long time. He wore a loud checked sports coat and was looking down into his coffee with a pensive, almost woeful expression.

When I stopped by him there came a look of annoyance at being bothered by another celebrity seeker, but then he brightened with recognition, rose, and threw his arms around me. I laughed self-consciously, feeling relieved by his show of affection, even if it was a mite too effusive.

"I saw you in the play," he said, motioning for me to sit down. "You were great."

"Well, I've seen almost every movie you've ever made," I countered, but before I had a chance to return his compliment he nodded as if I had already said it, and thanked me.

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There was suddenly an awkwardness between us, as if we had exhausted every topic and our friendship with this exchange. Then I began to recount the whereabouts of our old friends but grew stifled by his mechanical nods and muttered "uh-huhs" which began to come even before I finished a sentence. I got the feeling he really wasn't listening, and I began to bridle inside.

Then I mentioned Jack Dunn. I had saved him for last and paused after uttering the name to see if he was interested in continuing the topic. He started to nod again and then lifted his eyes toward mine, as if seeing me for the first time since his greeting.

"How's he doing?" he asked, and I told him, with no embellishments. His nods changed to a sincerely sympathetic shaking of his head and his grunts sounded more genuine than the artificial and incessant "uh-huhs."

However, that was the only moment of real conversation I had with him. We went on to other things and I began to recognize his more eloquent responses as the same comments he had made during his last appearance on Johnny Carson. In fact, it was a welcome interruption when he suddenly discovered a spot of beet juice on his sports coat and erupted with an angry curse that indicated he might still be subjected to the same human emotions as the rest of us. I finally got so annoyed that I hastily took my leave, carefully informing him that things were great with my career in case his standoffishness was due to the fact that he was now a big-time star and producer terrified that an old school chum would trade on their past relationship. He seemed hardly aware of my departure as he dabbed water onto his soiled lapel.

I guess some of my feelings could be put down to envy but mostly it was disappointment. Later I was filled with remorse that I hadn't stayed longer and made the meeting more meaningful, but it wasn't until the next morning that I heard on the radio that he had died of unknown causes while spending the evening in Jack Dunn's apartment.

At first all it said was that the noted actor, Richard Cunningham, had been taken by ambulance to such-and-such hospital at around eight p.m. and had passed away a few hours later; but as I sat there at breakfast, stunned, a further bulletin was broadcast which stated he had suffered the attack while visiting the home of a friend, fellow actor James Dunn. James Dunn had been an Oscar-winning character man of days gone by, but I knew they meant Jack. My attempts to call him met with a continuous busy signal, so I immediately

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drove to North Hollywood, thankful that I was not included in the day's shooting at the studio.

Jack's apartment was actually a bungalow which shared its walls with similar structures, forming a one-story, box-like building of six living quarters, each with its own entrance. There was a small crowd before his door composed of neighbors and curiosity-seekers who, like myself, had just heard the news on the radio. I forced my way through them, getting a few remarks hurled my way, and rang the bell. I could feel the attention my presence had focused on the doorway, and when Jack appeared there was a small collective gasp. He did his best to ignore the throng and hurried me inside.

"Dick came over last night around seven-thirty," Jack told me. "You can imagine my surprise. All those years without a word and suddenly he shows up at my door without warning, and at that hour!"

"What did he want?"

We had to pause because the phone rang. In fact, it hardly stopped ringing the whole time I was there and usually it was a reporter or crank who had found Jack's number in the phone book.

"I don't know," he went on after he hung up. "He was strange, like something was bothering him or he was afraid of something. He just asked to come in and acted like he was paying a call on somebody he saw yesterday. I got him a drink while he sat there in some awful-looking coat, his face covered with perspiration and makeup. He said he had just finished shooting the last scene in his new film and hadn't bothered to change. It was what he said next that really surprised me."

"What?"

"He asked me to get him a pizza."

"What?"

"Well, I guess it isn't as bizarre as it sounds. When we were rooming together in New York, before you got out of the army, he and I had so little money we used to eat pizza for supper most of the time. We'd take turns getting it, and last night Dick said, 'Let's pretend it's old times, and it's your turn to get the pizza.' "

Jack sighed wearily, and I saw he was tired, having been up all night explaining this to the police. I saw an unmade bed through the open bedroom doorway but then I glanced toward the kitchen and noticed the garbage can was empty.

"Where's the box?" I asked.

"That's what the cops wanted to know," he went on, smiling sadly.

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"I told them the truth. When I got down to the pizza place two blocks from here I saw it was closed. I didn't feel like driving all over the Valley finding another one, so I came back and found Dick lying on the floor, retching and gasping for breath. The first thing I did was call the police. It's been hell ever since, what with the calls and that crowd out there and all the questions I've had to answer."

If it was bad then, it must have been unbearable for him when the report came in that Richard Cunningham had died of a lethal dose of poison, usually found in the ingredients of a well-known plant insecticide. The glass from which he had been drinking in Jack's apartment, which the police had taken that night as a matter of course, was loaded with it.

The radio went on to say that the possibility of suicide was extremely remote as no note or message had been found, and the star was in a period of great prosperity, with a new film scheduled to be released, two of his three ex-wives remarried, and the possibility of a new marriage soon. None of his business associates and friends who were interviewed, including his partner Carl Maxwell and myself, remembered hearing or seeing anything in his demeanor that day which would lead them to suspect self-destruction. I have to admit my involvement hardly qualified me as a judge of his current behavior, but how could I resist the attention?

Jack also got his share of attention, especially when it was announced that he had been arrested and charged with the murder of Richard Cunningham, and this time they got Jack's name right. I suppose it was inevitable, not only because of the circumstances but because sooner or later a police car was bound to drive by the pizza restaurant that Jack maintained was closed that night and see the same sign I did when I visited it—"Open 24 hours! We never close!"

My next visit with Jack was at the county jail where he was being held without bail.

"My lying about the pizza clinched it," Jack said, sitting across from me in the visiting room. "I've read enough detective stories to know that they first try to prove motive, means, and opportunity. Once they found Dick's glass and the insecticide on my window sill, they certainly had the last two."

"Why did you lie about the pizza?" I asked.

"To keep them from getting to a motive, too." He smiled sadly as I stared in amazement. "That pizza thing had a deeper meaning for us than just an old ritual. I never told you about it, but I did mention it to others over the years. That's how the police found out. It hap-

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pened when Dick and I were rooming together. One evening I went out for the pizza and Dick took a call for me from a producer who had seen me in an off-Broadway production and wanted me to audition for a part in his next Broadway show. Dick never told me about it. The next morning he went to the guy's office, explained that I was out of town on the road, and asked if he could have a chance to read for the part. You know what a great first reading Dick always gave, even though he doesn't expand much in rehearsals. He got the job.

"That was the show that started everything for him. I never found out about the call until a year later when I met the producer who was now pretty much down on his luck, and he remarked about the irony of it, my being out of town when the big break came. I was really crazy with rage about it, but I've had time to cool off. There's no reason to believe I would have had the same rise Dick had from that show, but I still think it was a pretty rotten thing to do."

He sighed and lit a cigarette. "Anyway, when I went out the night of his death for a pizza it all came back to me and I wondered if he was rubbing it in. That's the real reason I never got one. I just drove around for about a half hour before I had nerve enough to go back, thinking I might have killed him if—"

He broke off abruptly, startled by the implication of his words and the strength of his emotions. I looked at him, not so much shocked by his anger as by the realization of the undercurrents that had been unapparent to me in their relationship. Afterward I began to remember how Dick in college had always tried to ingratiate himself with the professors and administrators, and suddenly I saw that much of his advancement had been due to his talent for manipulating people and using circumstances to his own advantage rather than to any ability as an actor. I was also upset by the revelation that I now believed it was possible for Jack to have killed him.

"You said"—I found my voice strangely hoarse and cleared it—"you said that you were gone for a half hour. Did you tell the police that?"

"Yeah. But they don't believe me. I lied to them about the pizza place being closed so they wouldn't find out about my driving around, fuming at the memory of what Dick had done to me. Now they say I was never out of the apartment at all and that I'm only trying to make it look like somebody else came in and slipped Dick the poison."

"Could someone else have?"

He shrugged. "I didn't lock the door when I left, and he would

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have opened it anyway if somebody knocked. The entrances are all private and you can pretty well come and go without being seen."

The grand jury didn't take much time to deliberate. Jack was bound over for trial on the charge of murder in the first degree. Naturally the media had a field day. Photos of Jack and Dick were plastered all over the front page, along with others who wanted to cash in on the resultant publicity. Writers, agents, hangers-on, fellow actors, all came forward to proclaim their connection, no matter how peripheral, with the affair.

Dick's funeral was attended by a host of celebrities who waited their turn to express their grief before the television cameras. Dick's partner, Carl Maxwell, went on at great length about how the movie Dick had completed just before his death would be released as a memorial to a great artist, mentioning its title many more times than Dick's name. The network that was to show the pilot I had completed made sure their news affiliate sought me out for a few words and the day after I appeared on the evening broadcast I received a call from my agent saying I was now up for a part in a major motion picture.

Three months after Dick's death, with Jack awaiting trial and Dick's picture set for release the next morning, I found myself in the wardrobe room of the same studio I had worked in before, being fitted for my first feature film. The costumer, Sheldon DeWitt, had brought out two identical gray suits which I thought were atrocious, but he vetoed my request that I wear my own clothes.

"Nothing doing, sweetheart," he insisted, holding out one pair of trousers. "If it was one day's work, okay, but you're in this flick for ten days. Anything could happen." While I was putting on the trousers he glanced down at a picture of Jack featured in the newspaper lying on a nearby chair. "Nobody seems to care what the wardrobe department goes through. I was on *his* last picture, you know." He tossed his head toward the newspaper and I knew he meant Dick, not Jack. "That last day was a horror. I got here at six that morning and we didn't even start shooting till after lunch. The whole morning was taken up with the great star arguing with his partner while everyone stood around and waited."

"What were they arguing about?" I asked, trying to sound half interested. He held out the coat for me to put on.

"Lord knows," he sighed. "They were always at it. I remember once it was going on outside the wardrobe room and I heard something about the budget. But that's nothing new. Most of the time

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the money goes into somebody's pocket instead of into the production. *Wardrobe* is always short-changed. And somebody is always yelling about it and making threats about auditing the books or going to the police, but it never happens. All I know is that the morning Cunningham died, he and Maxwell went at it tooth and nail, and then when Maxwell left the set Cunningham refused to come out of his dressing room. We didn't shoot a frame of film until after lunch. That's why it went on so late."

"So you think Maxwell killed him?" asked Jack's lawyer when I went to see him the next day. He was a young public defender who already looked on the case as hopeless.

"Well, it could add up that way," I told him. "There was some hanky-panky about the budget. Dick may have threatened to go to the police. When Dick left the studio that night Maxwell followed him to Jack's place. When he saw Jack leave he went in and tried to reason with Dick about the cops. When he saw it was no use he slipped him the poison."

"No," the lawyer said wearily. "It can't add up that way. For one thing, when a man dies in such a circumstance everybody connected with him is investigated. Don't you think the police thought of Maxwell, too? They checked the books and didn't find a single discrepancy."

"He fixed it up," I countered desperately. "Out of his own pocket, to avoid a murder charge."

"Okay," he went on, still disbelievingly. "How could Maxwell have followed Cunningham to Jack's apartment when he was at a party in Bel Air?"

I looked at him with disappointment, but I was becoming more and more convinced that I was on the right track.

"Did he give the party?"

"No."

"How many people were there?"

"About fifty. It was an outdoors affair."

"Okay!" I said with even more confidence. "There's nothing simpler than slipping away at an outdoor party in the night, especially when there's such a huge guest list, and then appearing later without anyone knowing you were gone. And it's only about a half hour from Bel Air to North Hollywood, if that."

"Then that rules out your idea that he followed Cunningham when he left the studio. How did he know where to find him?"

"Dick told him."

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"When?" he went on relentlessly. "According to Jack it was an unexpected visit, and even you said he never mentioned Jack at lunchtime until you brought him up. As for Maxwell, he left the studio that morning and didn't talk to Cunningham directly after that."

"How about a telephone?"

"When and why?" He was close to shouting now. "You have to prove these things! Not only do you have to prove Maxwell had the opportunity to leave the party, you have to prove he knew where Cunningham was going, which means you have to find out why Cunningham *did* go to see Jack, which is something nobody's been able to do!"

It was a tall order and I didn't know where to begin. Maybe I was just clutching at straws in hopes of doing Jack some good, but there was something inside of me that kept telling me to continue. It even sent me down to Westwood that night to attend the premiere of Dick's last movie, just because I knew Maxwell would be there. What I intended to do, I don't know, but I stood in the lobby watching him enter with his entourage of yes-men, reporters, and backers. A short man with a balding head, Maxwell seemed to revel in the attention and commotion.

I had checked him out during the day with my agent who told me he had a reputation for being rather unscrupulous as a showman, creating sensation publicity for films that had little to do with the truth or the quality of the movie; but nobody had ever been able to prove any financial dishonesty on his part. His taste was certainly questionable when you saw the giant cardboard photos of Dick hanging in front of the theater, bordered in black and proclaiming this film as the last great act of a supreme artist who gave up his life for the motion-picture industry.

I decided to put off my confrontation with him until a better time and filed in to see the picture. It was awful, and everyone knew it, but who was going to say so? As the gags fell like bombs, all anybody could think of was the fact that it was being perpetrated by a corpse. To have booed would have been like spitting on his grave, so the laughs came, forced and artificial, all the way through to the last scene where Dick stood smiling in that hideous sports coat I had seen him wear in the commissary, while the credits rolled over his gigantic face and everyone stood and applauded.

If I had had Sheldon DeWitt's home address, or could have got it that night, I would have been pounding on his door and rousing him

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from his slumber. As it was, I had to wait until the next morning to race into the wardrobe room where I found him measuring an actor in a mailman's uniform. I caught my breath and tried to sound conversational as the mailman stood there, his existence as a human being forgotten by both of us.

"I'm still new to this end of the business," I began. "But I remember your telling me that nobody is allowed to wear his own clothes in a movie if his part is a large one. But do you ever allow an actor to walk away from the studio wearing his wardrobe home?"

"No way," he snorted. "I'd like to see one thread leave this lot without my knowing."

"Then how is it that Cunningham was wearing his wardrobe from the picture when he died?"

"Oh, that"—he waved it aside and spread his tape measure across the mailman's shoulders. "We're not talking about people now, sweetie. Stars are something else. Especially when they're also producing. Cunningham insisted his own sports coat was perfect for the character, so what can a poor peon like me do?"

"But when I met him at lunch that day he had spilled juice on the lapel. Yet when I saw the film last night the lapel was clean."

"Which is why we have back-ups," he said with a superior smile. "Remember my fitting you for two identical suits? You have to consider such things. I found out where Cunningham bought that awful coat and went to the same store and bought a duplicate. Do you know what it would have cost us if we had to stop shooting to get that stain out, providing we could? We couldn't change the wardrobe because we had already established that coat in other scenes and the story was supposed to have taken place in a single day."

"So you used the back-up coat for the final scene?"

"Of course. I was as unobtrusive about it as possible. After all, you don't call down a major star for being a sloppy eater, and he had been upset by the argument with Maxwell that morning. After lunch, while he was rehearsing in his robe, I went into his dressing room and made the switch."

"Then when he left the set he was wearing the back-up coat and probably didn't even know it."

"I guess so. They were the same make and everything. A perfect match except for the stain, which would have looked enormous on the screen but wasn't that conspicuous in real life. I remember now. I put the stained coat in the storage room. I never tried to get the

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stain out. It looked like beet juice which is impossible. Anyway, since it was the last day of the shoot, who cared?"

Who cared? I kept pressing him on it until he left the mailman standing there without trousers and took me into the back. There, hanging among hundreds of other coats, never having been touched since the wrap-day months ago, we found it, and inside the breast pocket we found the note.

"Dick thought the note was still in the pocket of the coat he was wearing when he left the studio and went to see you that night," I told Jack as we sat once more in his apartment. "He never knew the coats had been switched. He wrote it that morning after he realized he was facing ruin and possibly prison if Maxwell went to the police as he threatened. You see, it was Dick who had diverted the budget money into his own pocket. He had been doing it for some time."

I paused as the telephone rang and I waited for Jack to answer it.

"It's all in the note," I went on when he finished. "A full confession. But you know, if you read between the lines you can see something else too. A sort of weariness, probably caused by a lifetime of deceit. He was looking back at three failed marriages and doubted his ability to make a fourth one work. There was also the terror of being found out—not merely as a thief but a fake. Bad actors know they're bad by the lack of satisfaction their work gives them. They live in fear that soon the world will realize it too, and turn on them."

"But why didn't Maxwell ever tell anybody the truth about Dick?"

"Why should he? He stood to make more money by keeping quiet after he died. He knew he had a turkey on his hands which no amount of false advertising could save. Suddenly he had the greatest of all publicity gimmicks which would turn a guaranteed bomb into a box-office bonanza. So he made up the theft from his own pocket, assured that he could recoup a hundred times over if he didn't let the world know what a crook Dick was."

I leaned forward. "Remember, for all he knew Dick *had* been murdered . . . by you. He never guessed, nor did any of us, that Dick came here that night, believing he had his suicide note in his pocket. I doubt if he had settled on the means until he saw that insecticide on the window sill. That's when he sent you away and took the stuff."

Again the phone rang.

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"But why?" asked Jack, after he had hung up. "Why come here at all? Why do it here? Was it a last gesture of contempt for me?"

"A gesture perhaps, but I don't think of contempt. Atonement maybe."

Jack looked at me puzzled. The phone rang again and it turned out to be another agent who wanted to talk to him about his career. I got up and left as Jack checked his date-book for a time in which to see him.

One thing about Richard Cunningham. He knew the business inside out.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

TREES

by ELEANOR SULLIVAN

"You Mr. Kilmer?"
The gruff voice said.
The father choked up,
His eyes were red.

"Leave the unmarked bills
"Under the tree
"At the far end
"Of your property."

He hesitated.
Then wheedled the voice:
"You pays your money,
"You takes your Joyce."

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a *NEW* Captain Leopold story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

No matter how far away Captain Leopold may go—to Newfoundland (or to Timbuktu or Outer Mongolia or Tierra del Fuego)—it will always be the same. If there is a crime in the vicinity, Captain Leopold will become involved. And this time he becomes involved in a strange way . . . Two interlocking stories, packed with danger and suspense . . .

CAPTAIN LEOPOLD GOES FISHING

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Sam Cargo crossed the Canadian border into Maine shortly after dawn, moving through the woods near the shallow river that formed the boundary line at that point. He wore a knapsack on his back and carried a guitar over one shoulder. It was about a half-hour's walk through a densely wooded area before he reached a farmer's pasture, and then another ten minutes until he finally had a dirt road beneath his worn boots. He followed this road for a few miles to the highway. It was only a two-lane blacktop, but there were cars passing and he knew he could hitch a ride.

It was his misfortune that the first car to stop was a sheriff's patrol vehicle. The driver was a fat middle-aged man with a ruddy complexion who leaned over to open the door on the passenger side. "Get in, fella," he said.

"I—thanks," Cargo said, because there was no way out of it now. He slid into the front seat and closed the door.

"Travelin' far?"

"Heading up to Canada."

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"Sure you didn't just come from there?"

"No, I came from Boston. I'm a student at Boston U."

The fat man turned to study him through narrowed eyes. "You look a bit old for a student. I see a few flecks of gray in your beard."

"I'm working for my master's degree."

"What's your name?"

"Tom Higgins," Cargo said. It was a name he'd used before.

"Well, Tom Higgins, I'm Sheriff Lask. Tell you what I'm goin' to do. I'm goin' to drive you in to our jail—"

"What for?"

"Calm down and listen. I'm goin' to drive you in to our jail and then call the immigration service. They'll come over and check you out. If you pass inspection you can be on your way in an hour."

"You can't hold me! I didn't do anything!"

"Well, I'm not sayin' you did. But folks do slip across the border once in a while, and I think we should have a look at that knapsack of yours."

"Come on, Sheriff! Give me a break!"

There were homes on both sides of the road now, and Cargo could see they were coming into a town. "I'm givin' you a break," the sheriff said. "If you're clean and your story checks out, the immigration boys will even give you a lift up to the border."

"Thanks," Cargo told him. He noticed the sheriff drove with one hand, keeping his right hand close to the holstered revolver on his belt.

The jail was a single-story building near the center of town, and Cargo was pleased to see the sheriff unlock the door. That meant there were no deputies inside. "I'm gonna put you in a cell till they come," Sheriff Lask told him, "but I won't lock the door. You're not under arrest, long as you cooperate."

"Can I play my guitar while I wait?"

"Sure, go ahead." The sheriff went to the phone and made his call. "They'll be here in about twenty minutes," he said. "If you're clean you got nothing to worry about."

Cargo sat in the open cell strumming a country song on his guitar and humming along with it. After a few minutes Sheriff Lask came back and stood in the cell door. "You're pretty good with that thing. I got a son just learning to play guitar."

"I've been playing for ten years," Cargo said with a smile.

The sheriff stepped into the cell and bent forward with a frown. "You've only got five strings on that guitar. Did you break one?"

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"No," Cargo said with a smile, "I've got it." He shifted position slightly and stopped playing. "Right here."

Sheriff Lask tried to jump back but Sam Cargo was too fast for him. The wire looped around his neck and Cargo pulled it tight.

When the immigration men arrived ten minutes later they found the sheriff's body on the floor of the cell. The killer, whoever he was, had escaped through the jail's rear door.

It was only the second time in their years of working as a team that Captain Leopold and Lieutenant Fletcher had taken a vacation together. Leopold usually felt that one of them had to remain in the city, on call if not actually in the office. But the crime rate had been surprisingly low for July, and Sergeant Connie Trent was looking forward to a week in charge of the department.

"I promise to call you if anything important happens," she told them.

Leopold snorted at that. "Fat chance you'll have of reaching us in the wilds of Newfoundland. Fletcher is talking about going salmon fishing up in the middle of nowhere!"

Connie came close to giggling. "Excuse me, Captain, but somehow I can't picture you out in the wilds anywhere!"

Fletcher joined in the general merriment. "Listen, Connie, I've been trying to get him to go fishing with me for years, so don't discourage him. Once I get him out on the stream he'll love it."

And so Connie took over the department for a week while Leopold and Fletcher drove north through New England in a station wagon loaded with camping and fishing gear. It was a two-day drive to Newfoundland, including several hours on the ferry from Nova Scotia, and they broke up the trip with a night in a motel on the Canadian border.

"They even have murders up here," Fletcher said, glancing through a local newspaper. "A sheriff in one of the towns was strangled with a wire in his own jail. Apparently he'd arrested someone who killed him and escaped."

"I'm on vacation, Fletcher, and I refuse to even look at a newspaper."

"Yeah," Fletcher agreed. "It's not our concern."

In the morning they were on the road again, driving across New Brunswick and Nova Scotia to the ferry which would take them to Newfoundland. "It's a long trip just to catch a few fish," Leopold grumbled.

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"You've never seen anything like the salmon up here, Captain—I guarantee it!"

It was late that evening when they arrived at the camping area where they'd be staying, and Leopold's only impression of the area was that the breeze was pleasantly cool after the July heat of the city. But the following morning, when Fletcher led him out in wading boots to stand in the rushing waters of a wooded stream, he had to admit it was an experience unlike any other.

After two days of it he told Fletcher, "You know, I could grow to like this place. You forget there's a real world out there."

Fletcher deftly cast his line into the stream. "I know just what you mean."

"I was planning to phone Connie back at the office, but I think she can manage things by herself."

The salmon were biting that week, and even though they cooked several over a fire at night they still finished their four-day stay with fifteen large fish to take back. "What do we do with these?" Leopold wanted to know.

"The shopkeepers around here are very cooperative. They'll freeze the fish for us and we can take them back in our ice chest."

"Sounds good to me," Leopold agreed. "I can't wait to see Connie's face when I dump one on her desk Monday morning."

Sam Cargo finished shaving off his beard and stepped back from the bathroom mirror to inspect the result. Satisfied, he splashed water on his face and then wiped it clean. Cynthia was sitting cross-legged on the bed when he emerged, and she gave a hoot of delight at the sight of him. "You got rid of the whiskers at last!"

"I thought women liked beards," he said.

"Not this woman. But what made you change after all this time?"

"I got into some trouble on that last trip across. I figured I should change my appearance before we go back."

"We're going back to Canada?"

He nodded. "Today, if you're ready."

"Sure! Where to this time?"

Cargo weighed how much he could safely tell her. "Newfoundland. A boat's bringing in a shipment for me."

"What is it this time?"

"You'll see."

"You going to try running it across on your back again?"

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"Hell, no! I'm getting too old for country sheriffs and the border patrol. This time I'll let someone else carry it across."

"Not me, I hope!"

Cargo chuckled. "No, not you, baby."

They crossed into Canada that afternoon, driving Cynthia's car as if they were any other American tourists. He decided to avoid the possible pitfalls of road patrols along the route by taking the long overnight ferry ride from Halifax to St. John's. The journey was a bit longer that way, but he felt it was safer. Besides, he didn't have to meet Frenchy in Newfoundland until Wednesday.

Frenchy was a middle-level Montreal mobster who made money any way he could. Sam Cargo's smuggling operation was a bit out of his line, but he was more than willing to lend a hand if the price was right. After a close call while carrying a backpack of LSD capsules across the border, Cargo was ready for Frenchy's aid and also for his connections. "Something valuable's coming into Newfoundland," Frenchy had told him on the phone. "Think you could get it to New York?"

"No problem," Cargo had replied, without even knowing what the goods were. He'd been a smuggler for most of his adult life, bringing in narcotics from Canada and illegal aliens from Mexico. The aliens right now were more profitable than drugs, but also more risky. They were big items, for one thing, and they were alive. Sam Cargo preferred working with something that could be hidden in a tube of toothpaste or the heel of a shoe—though no self-respecting smuggler would use either place these days.

The first person Cargo ever killed had been a Central American alien who objected to being abandoned in the Arizona desert. Cargo had gunned him down without thinking twice about it, and after that life had seemed pretty cheap to him. It was shortly after the Arizona killing that he met Cynthia Arnold in a luxurious Houston hotel. She'd just conned a wealthy Texas oilman out of $20,000 and she needed a way out of town, fast. She and Cargo had taken off in the middle of the night with some private security guards on their tail, hitting speeds of a hundred miles an hour across the flat Texas pastureland. Their pursuers had gone off the highway somewhere south of Austin, and Cynthia had more or less been with Cargo ever since.

Frenchy's brother Max owned a general store on the southwestern tip of Newfoundland, only a few miles from where the Nova Scotia ferry docked at Channel-Port-aux-Basques.

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It had served as a meeting place before, and when Frenchy had suggested it Sam Cargo quickly agreed.

Driving along the southern coast of Newfoundland that Wednesday, Cynthia asked, "Why do you always carry that guitar everywhere, Sam? You hardly ever play it."

"Listen, that guitar has gotten me out of one or two close calls."

"But the customs guys always hassle people with beards and guitars," she pointed out.

"Well, the beard is gone and we won't be bringing anything over on the way back. Someone else will be carrying it."

"Who?"

Sam Cargo smiled. "I don't really know yet." Though he still didn't know what the goods were, he'd been playing around with an idea for some time. With the help of Frenchy's brother Max, he was sure it would work.

A few hours later, standing by a table in the back room of Max's store, he was positive it would.

Frenchy had just unscrewed an aluminum ski pole and dumped its contents on the tablecloth.

Diamonds.

More diamonds than Sam Cargo had ever seen in his life.

He licked his lips and asked, "How many?"

"Two hundred and forty-eight of them, all sizes." Frenchy seemed pleased at the impression he'd made. "It's the loot from the London diamond robbery last week. We have a buyer in New York if we can get them to him."

"How much are these worth?"

"The London papers said a million pounds, but it's more than that. I figure maybe three million dollars American."

Cynthia took a deep breath. "How much do you get for taking it across, Sam?"

He glanced at Frenchy. "My usual fee? Ten percent?"

"That's a bit high." Frenchy was a slim dark-haired man with a little scar at the left corner of his mouth. Cargo assumed he'd got it in a knife fight, though it was never mentioned. Frenchy was fast and good with a knife.

"High, hell! The diamonds are hot! They were stolen only a week ago! Every customs agent in the world is probably watching for them."

"All right," Frenchy agreed. "Ten percent of whatever they bring,

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but not a penny more. I'm not in this alone, you know. I've got people back in Montreal getting most of the money."

"That's your problem."

"You taking them across yourself?"

"Do I look foolish?" Cargo didn't mention the incident with the Maine sheriff. Even without his beard he'd been worried when they crossed the border coming north. He didn't know how much of a description the sheriff had given the customs people over the phone. "Frenchy, I think your brother Max might be able to help us on this. Call him in here, will you?"

Frenchy looked uneasy. "Max isn't in on this. He's just doing me a favor, letting us meet here."

"You'd better get him in on it. I need him."

Frenchy went into the front of the store and returned in a minute with Max. His brother was older and heavier, but their faces bore a strong family resemblance. Max's English accent was thicker, and his eyes lacked the calculated shrewdness of Frenchy's, but there was no doubt they were brothers. When Max saw the hundreds of diamonds spread on the tabletop, he started to turn away.

"Wait!" Cargo said. "We need you."

"For what?" Max asked.

"One time when we were up here some fishermen brought in their catch of salmon to be frozen."

"They do that all the time."

"Every day?"

"Yes, at this time of the year, when the salmon are running."

"How long do you keep the fish here?"

"Oh, a few hours. Overnight, sometimes."

"Are there many Americans here this week?"

"A few. There are always Americans."

"Good," Cargo said quietly.

It was the next morning when Max came into the back room with a bucket of freshly caught salmon. "How's this?" he asked Cargo. "Fifteen big ones."

"Who caught them?"

"Couple of Americans. Middle-aged, one of them's overweight. They won't give you any trouble. They're starting back tonight, taking the ferry and then driving down through New England. Their car has Connecticut plates."

"Perfect!" Cargo said. "Cynthia, start dividing up those diamonds. Put them in fifteen of these little plastic bags."

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He produced a long steel needle and threaded it with a fishing line. Then he picked up the first of the little plastic bags and tied its ends tightly to the fishing line, about a foot from the needle. He ran the needle's point straight into the mouth of the fish, lengthwise through the body, pulling the fishing line and the packet of diamonds along. With a bit of a push the needle's point emerged from the body near the tail of the salmon. Cargo drew it out till the needle was clear and the packet of diamonds had been drawn into the salmon through the mouth. Then he cut the line flush with the fish's body.

"There you are," he announced with a certain touch of pride. "The diamonds are inside the fish, and without cutting it open. Freeze it and wrap it for them while I get busy on the rest of them."

Frenchy frowned at the salmon. "You're giving the diamonds to a couple of perfect strangers?"

"I'm giving them back fifteen frozen salmon to carry across the border in their ice chest. We'll be following them every inch of the way. Once they're back in Maine we'll stop their car and take the ice chest."

"What if they put up a fight?"

Sam Cargo shrugged. "Then I'll kill them."

It was toward evening when Fletcher and Leopold went back to the store for their fish. The owner, a jolly French-Canadian named Max, had carefully wrapped the fish individually in newspaper. They loaded them into the ice chest and carried it to the car with difficulty. "We must have a hundred pounds of fish here," Leopold grumbled.

"Cheer up, Captain," Fletcher said, boosting the ice chest into the station wagon. "Just think of all the stories we'll have for Connie and the rest of them."

A pretty brown-haired girl had been watching their progress with the ice chest. "Are you two Americans?" she asked.

Leopold admired her tight jeans and open-necked shirt. "That's right. We're heading back there tonight."

"So're me and my friends." She squinted at Leopold. "Why does he call you Captain? You in the army or something?"

Leopold smiled. "I'm a detective captain, with the police. My friend here is a lieutenant, but I don't call him that."

"Is that so?"

"And I'll bet you're from Texas."

"How could you tell?"

"I'm a detective, remember?"

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Fletcher went back into the store to pay Max for the things they'd bought, and Leopold finished loading the station wagon. The girl watched a while longer and then drifted inside.

Fletcher returned and climbed behind the wheel. "Well, we're on our way. Glad you came along, Captain?"

"I'll admit it was an experience," Leopold acknowledged. He glanced back at Max's general store. "Who's the girl with the Texas accent?"

"Beats me," Fletcher said. "She seemed friendly enough."

They pulled out of the parking lot and headed for the dock. By the time they reached it the ferry from Nova Scotia was just coming in. Fletcher pulled into the line of cars waiting to go on board. "I figure we can stop at a motel on the other side overnight," he said. "It's about five hundred miles to Bangor, and we should be able to make that tomorrow. Then we can drive the rest of the way home Saturday morning."

"Sounds fine to me," Leopold said.

The car had barely pulled out of the parking lot when Cynthia came running into the back room. "Sam, those are a couple of detectives!"

"What?"

"One's a captain and the other is a lieutenant! And they've got the diamonds!"

"Calm down, will you? We'll still follow through with the original plan."

But Frenchy was nervous. "They might have guns, Sam."

"On a fishing trip?"

"Some cops carry them all the time."

Cargo thought about that. "They've met you, Cynthia. They know you. If we can get ahead of them on the road and pretend the car broke down, they'd probably stop for you. They'd even give you a lift to a telephone, and you could find out if they're armed."

"I don't like it, Sam," she said.

"Well, we can't just leave them to have a fish fry with three million in diamonds. What time does that ferry leave, Frenchy?"

He glanced at his watch. "We've got forty minutes."

"All right, let's get our things packed up. We've got to be on the boat with them when they leave."

"It's a long ride back to the States with those diamonds in the car with a couple of detectives," Frenchy said.

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"Don't worry. It'll just be that much easier for the diamonds to get through customs. The only trouble is, after we take the ice chest we can't leave them alive. Cops are too good as witnesses."

"God, Sam!" Frenchy muttered. "If we kill a couple of people they'll have every highway blocked looking for us!"

"Yeah," Cargo agreed. "Let's have a look at that map of Maine and see if there's a way out that won't be blocked."

Occasionally during the long drive the following day Leopold became aware of the little blue car that seemed to be keeping pace with them across Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Sometimes it was ahead, sometimes behind, but rarely out of sight. He saw nothing unusual in it, though, since this was the main highway south along the Bay of Fundy to the United States.

They crossed into Maine at Calais in the late afternoon. The customs check was more thorough than Leopold remembered, with the uniformed inspector even glancing into their ice chest before he waved them on. Leopold wondered if they were looking for anything special.

He'd caught sight of the little blue car in another lane at the customs station, but it was out of sight by the time they headed down Route 9 toward Bangor. Leopold had almost put it out of his mind when, some thirty minutes later, he suddenly saw the vehicle ahead of them, pulled off the road. A young woman stood beside it, waving for help. "Slow down, Fletcher. That looks like the Texas girl we were chatting with back in Newfoundland."

It was the same girl, and she recognized them at once. "Heavens, is it good to see a familiar face! Our car broke down. Could you give me a lift to a telephone?"

Leopold could see two men getting out the far side of the vehicle. "Sure, I guess we could. But maybe we can help fix it."

"It's something with the motor," the taller man said. "We've been working on it for an hour without any luck."

"This is my husband, Sam," the girl told them. "And our friend Frenchy."

"Pleased to meet you," Leopold mumbled automatically.

"And I'm Cynthia. You're the captain and the lieutenant, right?"

"That's right."

"I guess I'll be safe riding with a couple of lawmen. You're probably armed to the teeth!"

"We're on vacation," Fletcher said. "A fishing trip."

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Cynthia climbed into the back seat of the station wagon. "In Texas the police carry guns even when they go to the movies. But of course a lot of other people do too."

"How are you going to get back after your phone call?" Leopold asked.

"I hadn't thought of that," she admitted, looking helpless.

Her husband, Sam, leaned in the front window. "I know this is imposing a lot, but I think there's a phone just a mile or two down the highway. Could you bring my wife back after she phones? We'd be glad to pay you."

Fletcher and Leopold exchanged glances. "I suppose so," Fletcher told him. "We're ahead of schedule anyhow."

Leopold waved to the men as they pulled away. "We'll have her back in ten minutes."

"You don't know how much I appreciate this," Cynthia told them. "My husband's not very mechanical."

"I guess not," Leopold agreed. "He didn't even have the hood up."

There were wooded mountains rising on both sides of the highway. "At least it's a scenic area to be stuck in," she said. "Down in Texas everything's flat." She lit a cigarette. "Do you take Route Nine often?"

"It's the best way," Fletcher explained. "After Bangor we have expressways all the way home."

Her husband had been right about the telephone. There was a gas station and diner a mile or so along the road. Fletcher pulled in and Cynthia said, "I'll just be a minute."

"Take your time," Leopold told her. "I think I'll make a call too."

When he came out of the phone booth Fletcher was downing a quick beer at the lunch counter. "Gets hot driving. Want one, Captain?"

"Not right now. Let's drop the girl off first."

"Sure thing."

Cynthia emerged from the ladies' room. "All set. The tow truck should be there in fifteen minutes."

"We'd better get you back, then."

Fletcher pulled out onto the highway and they headed back the way they'd come. "I can't believe you fellows don't carry your guns on vacation," Cynthia said. "It sure wouldn't be like that in Texas."

Fletcher chuckled. "If we run into any bandits we'll beat them over the head with our fishing poles."

Cynthia's husband and the man called Frenchy were out of the

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car as Fletcher turned and pulled in behind them. Leopold started to open the door on his side but Cynthia spoke from behind him. "You two stay in the car," she said, her voice changed. "I have a gun."

Fletcher half turned in his seat. "What the hell—?"

"Keep calm," Leopold cautioned. "I think we're being robbed."

The man called Sam was careful to stay clear of Leopold's window. "They got any guns?" he asked Cynthia.

"No, nothing but fishing poles."

"Keep them covered while we unload the ice chest."

"The ice chest!" Fletcher exclaimed. "Nothing in there but our fish!"

"Shut up and unlatch the back door," Sam ordered.

Fletcher did as he was told and the two men slid the heavy ice chest from the rear of the station wagon. They carried it over to the little blue hatchback and put it inside.

Though occasional cars passed them, the traffic was moderate. The man named Sam waited until the road was clear in both directions and then ordered Leopold and Fletcher out of the car. For an instant Leopold thought they meant to steal the vehicle, but then he caught the glint in Sam's eyes and saw that he too had a gun.

The shrill sound of a police siren reached them from far off down the highway. Sam turned his head slightly and Leopold knew he wouldn't get a second chance. He lunged for Frenchy, who was nearest to him, and yanked the little man in front of him as a shield. Sam's head turned and he never hesitated as he fired two quick shots.

Leopold felt Frenchy's body go limp against his as the bullets struck. Cynthia screamed something and scrambled from the station wagon. "Shoot them, damn it!" Sam ordered, but the pistol was useless in her trembling hands. He cursed and shoved her toward the blue car, turning to fire another shot. But Fletcher had taken cover on the far side of the station wagon and the sound of the approaching siren was growing louder by the second.

Leopold supported the dying man and felt in his pockets for some weapon to return the fire, but Frenchy had been unarmed. Finally, as Sam and Cynthia jumped into the blue car and pulled onto the highway with a cinder-tossing spin of their tires, Leopold only had time to note the license number before they were gone.

The state police car sped up from the opposite direction and Leopold pulled out his wallet.

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"Police! There's been a shooting here! Two men and a woman held us up. This is one of the men. The other two are in that car."

"Right," the trooper said, reaching for his radio. "We'll send an ambulance and call ahead for road blocks. Will you be all right alone here?"

Fletcher had come out from behind the station wagon. "We're fine. Just get after those guys."

The trooper glanced at the fallen body of Frenchy. "What about him?"

"Get that ambulance here. I doubt if it'll be on time, though." As the patrol car pulled away in pursuit, Leopold knelt on the gravel beside the fallen man. "Can you hear me?"

There was a nod and he tried to speak, but his mouth was filling with blood. "What's in the ice chest?" Leopold asked. "Did you hide something there back in Newfoundland?"

Again the man nodded. Leopold could feel his pulse growing weaker. "Fletcher, give me a pencil and piece of paper." When he had them in hand he spoke again, very close to the dying man's ear. "Can you hear me? Take this pencil and try to write."

The fingers gripped the pencil.

"That's it! Look, your friends shot you and deserted you. Don't think you owe them anything. Tell me where they're headed. Print it on here. Where are they headed?"

The fingers tried to write but it was useless. Finally, gripping the pencil as tightly as he could, he traced the letters in the loose dirt by the side of the road. DETROIT, he printed, and then his body relaxed.

"Detroit! And tell me, what's in the ice chest?"

The pencil started tracing its letters again. This time it managed to form DIAMAN before it stopped.

"Diamonds!" Fletcher said. "He was trying to write *diamonds!*"

"Looks like it," Leopold agreed. Another siren was approaching, and this time it was the ambulance.

Leopold stood up and stared at the words in the dirt. DETROIT and DIAMAN. He shook his head and turned toward Fletcher. "The ambulance won't do him any good now."

There were few roads leading off Route 9, but Cargo took the first one he came to, turning left and heading toward the shore. He figured they were about twenty miles from the ocean at this point, and

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he could only hope they'd lose the single state police car that was following them before others joined in the chase.

"You killed Frenchy," Cynthia said after they'd driven for some minutes in silence.

"I sure hope so! I wouldn't want him alive telling the cops where we're heading!"

"How will we ever get our share of the money with Frenchy dead?"

"Use your head, girl! There are no more shares. We've got the diamonds and Frenchy is dead. They're all ours now."

"You're not taking them to New York?"

Cargo shook his head. "Not if I can find a buyer somewhere else. Don't you understand? This is retirement money! No more crossing the border with a pack on my back, no more sneaking things through customs. From now on we live in luxury."

"They'll have all the roads blocked."

"I told you before—we're not going by road. We're going by boat. We're very close to the Grand Manan Channel. We'll rent a boat there and head south. When we land we'll just be a couple of fisherfolk with a good day's catch. We'll dump the ice and let the fish start to thaw."

"What about the car?"

"It'll go in the water. By the time anyone finds it we'll be far away."

Cynthia was silent for a time, until at last they broke free of the sheltering trees and saw the water before them. "It's beautiful," she said. "Maybe we'll make it after all, Sam."

"Of course we'll make it."

"Sam?"

"What?"

"You'll never shoot me like you did Frenchy, will you?"

"Of course not! Don't be silly! Frenchy's death was an accident. He just got in the way."

They drove along the rocky coast in the early evening, searching for a boat-rental place. Finally they found one, in a little cove. The crusty old owner wanted too much money, but Cargo paid it. Then he and Cynthia unloaded the fifteen frozen fish into plastic shopping bags and carried them on board. "I'm going to drive the car down the road," he told the boat owner.

"You leave the car right here, young fella. It's my insurance you'll be back."

Cargo took a deep breath. The police would know the license num-

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ber. They'd be looking for it. He thought of the gun in the waistband of his pants and wondered if he could risk another killing. But maybe there was another way. "How about that garage over there? I'll leave it if I can keep it inside. I don't want the saltwater spray damaging the finish."

"Sure, put it in the garage," the old man agreed, prolonging his own life without realizing it.

Cargo took his guitar and a few belongings from the car and locked it up. He didn't expect to ever see it again. Then he went down and met Cynthia on the dock. The boat they'd rented was long and slender, the product of another era, but the inboard motor sounded good and that was the important thing.

The old man was just helping them to cast off when a tan car pulled into the parking lot. It came all the way up to the end of the pier before stopping, but Cargo didn't realize the danger until it was too late. The men who emerged weren't in uniform, and he didn't know they were police until he saw the riot guns aimed at him.

"We're police!" the nearest one shouted. "Don't cast off or we'll open fire!"

Cargo started for his gun and then thought better of it. The riot guns could make a sieve of the old boat. "You're making a bad mistake," he called back, trying to talk his way out of it.

But then he saw the second car pulling in, and recognized Leopold and Fletcher as they emerged from it.

Leopold watched while Sam and Cynthia were handcuffed and led over to the car. "At least let me bring my guitar along," Sam was pleading. "A little music can't hurt."

"It'll be hard to play with your hands cuffed behind you," one trooper said. "Get in the car."

It was Cynthia who asked the question. "How'd you find us so soon?"

Leopold leaned against the car, glad it was all over. "I phoned the troopers from that lunch counter, while you were supposed to be making your call. I just didn't buy that car trouble. You didn't even have the hood up, and Sam here said you'd been working on it an hour. I saw you go through customs only a half hour before that, and I knew you weren't more than five minutes ahead of us on that road."

"They've got our fish in their bag," Fletcher said, lifting it with difficulty.

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"And something more, I'll wager. Some diamonds inside those fish."

"How'd you know that?" Cynthia blurted out.

"Frenchy told us. Or at least he wrote it in the dirt before he died. He gave us a good idea of where you'd be, too."

"He said Detroit," Fletcher said, puzzled.

"Yes, he did," Leopold agreed. "But he also started to spell diamonds as d-i-a-m-a-n. That's the French word—*diamant*. After all, he was named Frenchy and he probably came from Canada. It wasn't too unlikely that he left a dying message in French rather than English. *Detroit* is the French word for channel or strait. The first thing I did was check a map of the area. Grand Manan Channel was close by, and I figured you'd rent a boat. The state police knew this was the closest boat-rental place, so we took a chance on it."

One of the officers was holding Sam's guitar. "You know something? The sheriff who was strangled over in Selo last week—he told the customs people in his call that he'd picked up a bearded guy with a guitar. He was strangled with a thin wire, and this guitar has one string missing!"

Leopold and Fletcher waited until the fish thawed enough to be cut open. They saw the diamonds spill out of their plastic pouches, and then they were on the road again. Fletcher was unhappy all the way to Bangor. "They kept our fish and we've got nothing to show for the trip!" he complained.

"We're alive," Leopold reminded him. "That's enough for me."

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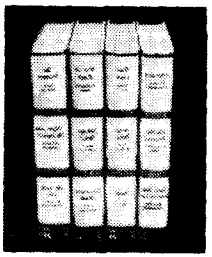

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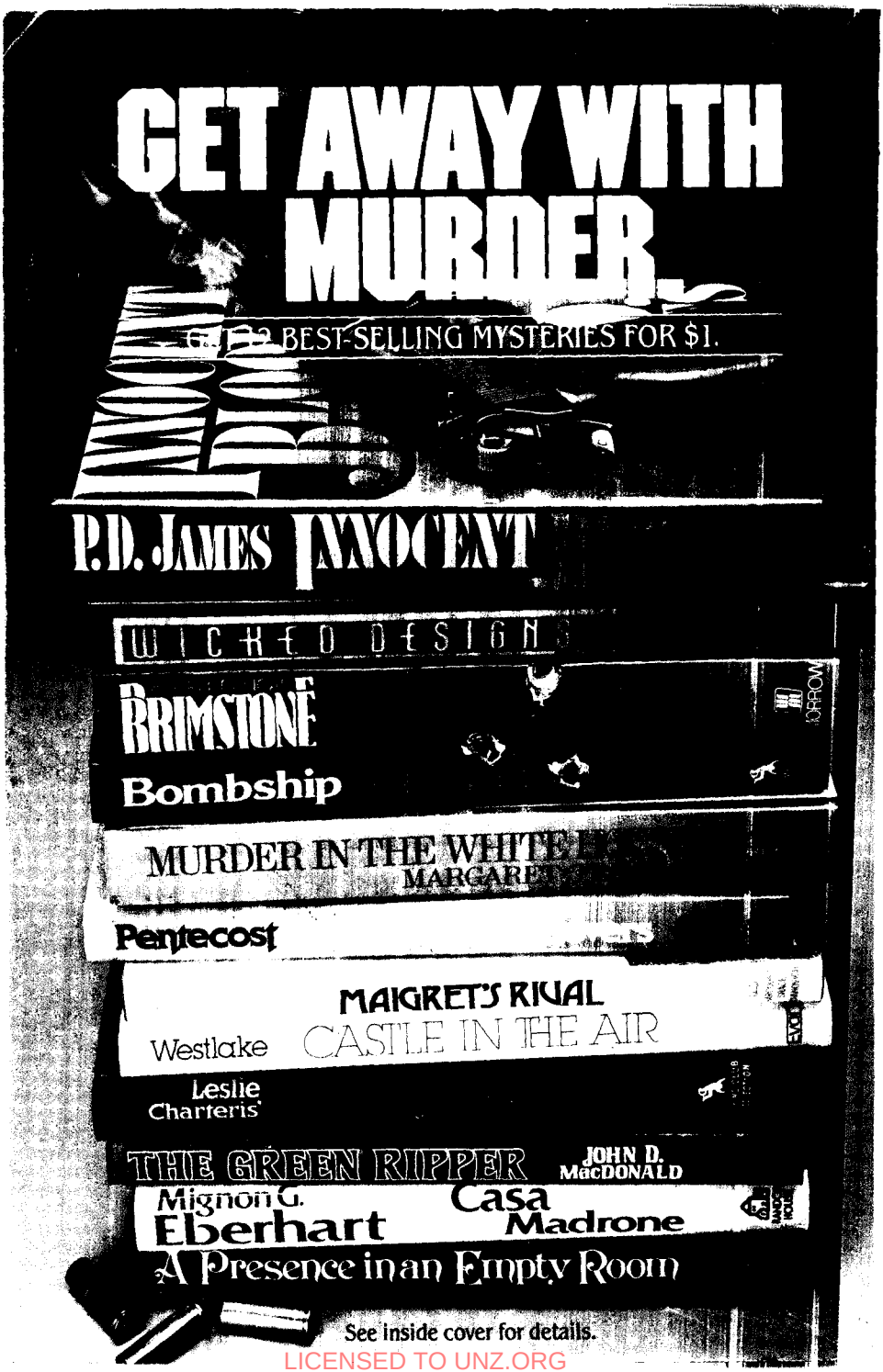

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